

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE



Margaret·Coulson·Walker



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BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

ACADIAN OWL

"From that day to this she and her descendents, ashamed of their bent noses and flattened faces, have hidden themselves in lonely places."

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

BY
MARGARET COULSON WALKER

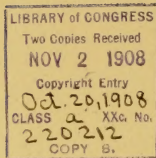
AUTHOR OF
"BIRDS AND THEIR NESTLINGS"
AND
"LADY HOLLYHOCK AND HER FRIENDS"

"Among the Romans not a bird
Without a prophecy was heard;
Fortunes of empires often hung
On the magician magpie's tongue."

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*O ye delicious fables, where the wave
And the woods were peopled, and the air, with things
So lovely! Why, ah! why has science grave
Scattered afar your sweet imaginings?*

Barry Cornwall.

FOREWORD

BELIEVING that bird lovers generally will be interested in the literary history of these objects of their affection, the author has endeavored to get together the most important avian legends and superstitions and also to discover in them evidences of apparent truth. Some of the most agreeable and interesting legends of the past were gathered about these guests of our groves whose actions formed the basis of innumerable fancies and superstitions.

Birds exercised a strong influence on prehistoric religion, having been worshiped as gods in the earlier days, and, later, looked upon as living representatives of the higher powers. The Greeks went so far as to attribute the origin of the world itself to the egg of some mysterious bird.

Then in the days when mortals did not die at all, but "passed," these small creatures, flitting about among the trees, represented to those inhabiting the earth the visible spirits of departed friends. The Aztecs believed that all good people, as a reward of merit, were metamorphosed at the close of life into feathered songsters, and as such were permitted to pass a certain term in the beautiful groves of Paradise. To them, as to all North American Indians, thunder was the cloud bird flapping his mighty wings, while the lightning was the flash of his eye. The peoples of other countries believed that the higher powers showed their displeasure

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by transforming wrongdoers into birds and animals as a punishment for their crimes.

In all lands birds were invested with the power of prophecy. They were believed to possess superior intelligence through being twice born, once as an egg and again as an animal. Because of their wisdom, not only they, but their graven images also, were consulted on all the important affairs of life.

The chief birds of portent were the owl, the raven and the woodpecker, though there were a number of others on the prophetic list. It will be remembered that Coleridge made the omen of a bird the leading motive of his poem. Many nations, notably the Japanese, are still believers in the direct communication between man and unseen beings, through birds and other agents. In Japan birds are regarded as sacred, and for this reason the agriculturist gladly shares with them the fruit of his toil.

While we of to-day attach no supernatural significance to the presence of these feathered creatures, and even though to us they possess no powers of prophecy, we can find a great deal of pleasure in observing these beings whose boding cries were regarded as omens by the greatest of earth-beings, whose actions in Vespasian's time were considered of vital national importance. An eagle perching on his tent proved to the people that beyond a doubt a true Judean ruler had been found.

Aside from their historic and literary interest these multitudinous and often contradictory legends and superstitions are of interest to us as a part of the faith of our fathers, much of which, combined with other and higher things, is in us yet. These beliefs of theirs, like many of what we are

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pleased to think our original ideas and opinions of to-day, were hereditary and largely a matter of locality.

An interest in bird life, once quickened, is destined to live always. As you become better acquainted with them, may these inhabitants of the air, regarded with respect and confidence by all nations of antiquity, prove equally interesting to you and a source of perennial pleasure; may their presence be ever significant of good, and may their voices bode you no misfortune.

THE AUTHOR.

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Mourn not for the owl, nor his gloomy plight!

The owl hath his share of good:

If a prisoner he be in the broad daylight,

He is lord in the dark greenwood!

Nor lonely the bird, nor his ghastly mate,

They are each unto each a pride;

Thrice fonder, perhaps, since a strange, dark fate

Hath rent them from all beside.

BRYAN W. PROCTOR (Barry Cornwall).

LEGEND OF THE OWL

(ESKIMO)

IN the old days when mortals were sometimes changed into other creatures if they happened to do anything to displease certain wicked fairies who seemed to be always conveniently near and ready to take offense, a wise and beautiful maiden did something to incur the enmity of one of these powerful beings and was immediately changed by her into a bird.

The once beautiful nose of the maiden became a hard beak; her eyes grew round with fright; the tender nails on her feet became long and horny and hooked; while from every pore in her body graying feathers started. Worst of all she knew that the spell cast over her could never be broken; she must remain as she was for all time—she and her children's children.

Blind with terror, she flew frantically and aimlessly about for hours, heedless of everything save her awful condition. Her wild wandering continued till, striking with great force against the hard ice-built wall of an igloo, her horny beak was bent and her face flattened by the blow. A cry of agony escaped her—a cry oft repeated through the night—a cry which henceforth was to be her only means of expression; and though she had the feet and feathers and wings of a bird, she still had the face of a mortal—flattened and with affrighted eyes.

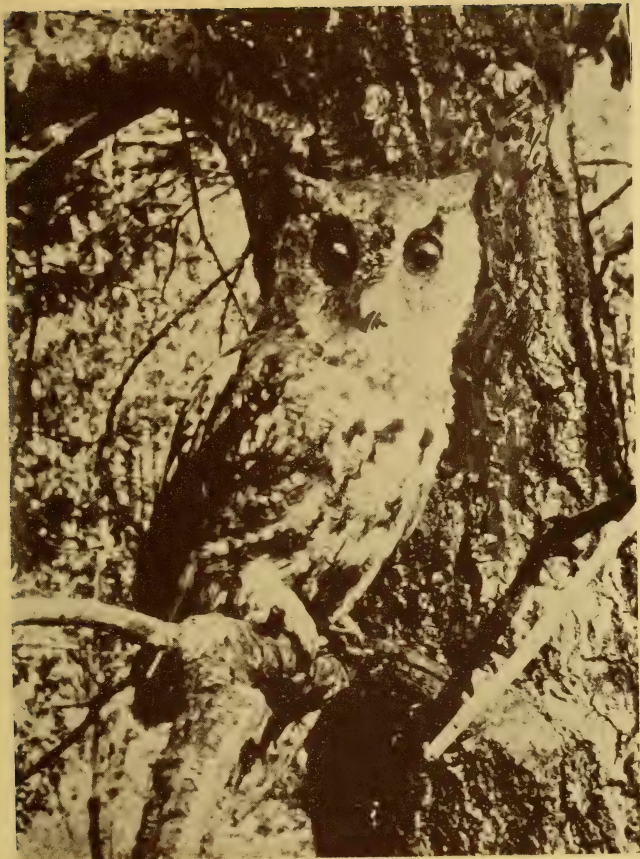
From that day to this, she and her descendants, who could not be even as other birds, ashamed of their bent noses and flattened faces, have hidden themselves, making their homes in hollow trees, or in lonely barns or belfries, going abroad only in the darkness, out of which sometimes come their ghostly, boding cries to warn us of its dangers.

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WHEN the silence of the summer night is disturbed only by the ethereal music of myriads of insects, and by occasional breezes rustling through the leaves—and the stealthy movements of nocturnal feeders on the herbage beneath—'tis then that the ghost walks—then that the weird wail of the owl is heard boding misfortune to the vast army of rats and mice, bats and moles, beetles and crickets, and other small night prowlers who fare forth at that time to seek their food. To them her supernatural, startling cry is a portent of woe, a certain harbinger of approaching death—a death that must occur that the owl and her family may live, for it is on these small creatures that she feeds and it is these that she carries to her young.

In the early twilight, the hour when moths fly humming, the owl and her mate leave the woodland retreat where they have spent the day in slothful slumber and go forth into more open places, each seeking some solitary post of vantage where she perches to watch for tiny field mice who may be walking abroad in the twilight in quest of succulent roots and grasses; or for unwary young rabbits who have come out to nibble the plantains; or possibly a toad who may be dampening his warty back in the dewy herbage.

As one of these approaches, silently sits the owl, apparently dozing, but really with every sense alert, till the



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

SCREECH OWL

"On seeing her sitting close to the hole of a tree where, with her protective coloration, she might easily be mistaken for a knot, we readily recognize the flattened face of the erstwhile maiden, with its close-pressed nose and affrighted eyes."

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faint sound of parted grasses, or a barely perceptible stir of leaves below, causes her, after a first quiver of excitement, to drop seemingly without motion upon her quarry, when, as it is tightly clasped in her claws, her sharp talons pierce its vitals, causing instant death.

Her smaller prey she carries to her perch, where, after a moment, it is tossed up with her beak and caught in its descent and swallowed whole. Larger animals, such as young squirrels, chipmunks and gophers, are dismembered and swallowed piecemeal. After a time the indigestible portions of all food are ejected in the form of compact pellets or "owl balls." Sometimes as many as a bushel of these are found in and around the nest.

The dietary range of the owl is not confined entirely to four-footed creatures: the fat beetle and night-flying moths are dainty morsels which she especially values as food for the owlets in the nest. Occasionally young birds are eaten, but not often. In winter, when other food is scarce, she is not averse to young barnyard fowls, for which the owner is amply repaid by the service rendered in ridding the place of mischievous vermin.

As the owl goes on her way—flying low, just above the lower bushes, or close to the ground in the open—her muffled wings make no sound. As with noiseless flight she moves forward in sidelong fashion in search of small animals, her gaze is turned on every moonlit spot where they may possibly be feeding, and on every patch of shadow where these tiny refugees, having heard her distant cry, may be claiming the right of sanctuary till her gruesome presence has passed. Aided by silence and partial darkness, the capture of her prey is almost certain. Sometimes, with a fearful cry, she casts a necromantic spell over these creatures

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on the ground, fastening them to the spot, when they are easily picked up. In this way she rids our fields of what might become troublesome pests if not held in check, thereby insuring the proper balance of nature.

The call of the owl, heard most frequently in the early part of the nights of late spring and early summer, when the young are in the nest, seems to be a cry of recognition or salutation between mates or parent birds and their young, calling to each other in a tongue meaningless to us, but full of purport to them. There is no more blood-curdling sound in all nature than the quivering wail of the great horned owl beginning on a high key and with a piercing tremolo running down the scale—a sound, once heard, never to be forgotten. It is like the scream of a woman in terrible agony. To one hearing it, the Eskimo story is plausible enough, for nothing less than a crushed face could call forth such a shriek.

On seeing the owl issuing from her hole in a tree or sitting on a limb close to its bole, where, with her protective coloration, she might easily be mistaken for a knot, we readily recognize the flattened face of the erstwhile maiden, with its close-pressed nose and affrighted eyes, and as she moves off across the wood her stunned, staggering flight, also, tells of the misfortune from which the years have not aided her in recovering.

In every land some of her descendants may be found, in all some two hundred species, and although they differ somewhat in size and in color, they each and every one bear the marks—in appearance, expression and nature of the calamity that befell their earliest progenitor—the flattened face, the pained human voice, the shrinking habits.

The most common forms in America are the speckled buff barn, or monkey-faced owl—belonging to a family dis-



Photograph by James H. Miller

SCREECH OWL AWAKENING

"At nightfall we hear her soliloquy of comfort
as she snuggles close to her dormitory bough
for a final nap after a day of deeper slumber."

OWL LIFE

tinct from the others—and the various species of the horned and hoot owls.

The barn owl is the one which most commonly frequents European ruins and which has been such a fruitful source of romantic inspiration to the poets. She is most common in the southern portion of our country, being rarely found north of Massachusetts.

The screech owl—this is a misnomer, for her cry is more of a melancholy call or tremulous sob than a screech—is found all over the United States. In autumn it appears to be most abundant owing to the necessity of its coming near our habitations at that time in quest of the food which earlier in the season is to be found in the fields. The voracious appetite of this little owl renders her an invaluable farmer's assistant.

A declining sun rouses her from her slumbers and sends her forth to seek food for herself and young, for whom she provides bountifully. An old apple orchard is the most promising place to look for her nest—in a hole made by the decay of a dead branch—though it is often found elsewhere.

At nightfall we may hear her soliloquy of comfort as she snuggles close to her dormitory bough for a final nap after a day of deeper slumber. Her comfortable "oo-oo-oo" is strongly suggestive of the enjoyment one has in his pillow on a crisp morning after he knows it is time for him to be up and doing.

However much the owl may enjoy the slothfulness of the home perch, it does not take her long to throw off her drowsy feeling, for by the time the fireflies have lighted their evening lamps she is alert and abroad. Should she go forth earlier or on cloudy days, as she sometimes does, she would more than likely be pursued and attacked by other birds who regard her as an enemy. In spirit, the jay, the chickadee and

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the red thrush call out with Richard III, "Out on ye, owls!" and quickly drive her into cover—if she is sufficiently awake to make her escape. A cry of alarm from any one of these birds assembles an attacking army in an incredibly short time. If unable to escape, their victim lies flat on her back and, while protected in the rear by the ground, turns to the enemy an armed front of claws and beak. The jay, who regards her at all times as an especial enemy, selects the eye of the owl as a particularly vulnerable point and does his best to reach it.

The long-eared owl, another common form, is strictly nocturnal in her habits, though the short-eared, which is equally common, frequently goes mousing on cloudy days. The former, possessing little architectural ability, often takes for her home the lofty deserted nest of a hawk, crow or squirrel, while the latter, the least owl-like of all the owls, makes her home on the ground on a high spot in a grassy marsh.

The barred, or hoot owl, which in the United States is by far the most common of the larger owls, is especially marked by the absence of horns and by its dark eyes. Its call, "whoo-whoo-whoo-who-who," with variations and abbreviations, Mr. Frank Chapman likens to deep-voiced, mirthless laughter. He has heard two of these birds in concerted performances, one uttering about ten rapid hoots, while the other, in a slightly higher tone, hooted half as fast, both performers ending together with a "whoo-ah." In Iowa their weird shrieks are often heard during the early summer, but more often in the fall.

The largest and finest of all the owls is the great horned owl—the most majestic of her kind—who measures full



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

GREAT HORNED OWL

Young of the "Great Horned Owl who
has the wildest, most piercing shriek."

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twenty-two inches and who has the wildest, most piercing shriek.

The smallest, most lovable and least shy of this interesting family is the Acadian or saw-whet, so called from his cry, which is supposed to resemble the sound made in sharpening a large saw. This little fellow is attractive in every way: in dress—cinnamon brown streaked with white; in manner—most friendly, and, late in the season, in voice, for then his saw-whet tones have softened into a gentle moan. This queer sound that he makes is said to be his amatory note, and, while as an expression of affection it is not exactly in line with our ideals, it ought to be as effective a love song as the rolling tattoo of the woodpecker.

Owls, who are said to mate for a lifetime, and who are believed never to prove unfaithful to their choice, come to us with the earliest promises of springtime—when all nature is silent except for the breaking up of the coverings on her ice-locked streams and the creaking moan of bare boughs tossed about by the winds. Immediately they seek a home in some hollow tree, or in a deserted hawk's, crow's or squirrel's nest. The great horned owl, the first of the family to pay heed to vernal promises, seeks her nest as early as the latter part of February, and is followed by the barred owl early in March and the screech owl and the long-eared early in April. The eggs of all are pure white with a dull, rough surface, and the owlets which come from them, fluffy balls like powder-puffs.

While the young are in the nest, the parent birds are most devoted. When the red thrush is singing her even-song, and when swallows are darting about in pursuit of the belated insects of the day or those called out by evening damps, the waning light brings back sight to the sleep-glazed eye of

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the owl, who is forced to be most active then in seeking food. Inactivity comes again with total darkness, when the owl again takes to her perch till the moon rises or dawn brings again the half light that sharpens owl vision. Bright moonlight nights are seasons of especial prosperity to the owls; for it is then that they see best—then that they bring most food to the owlets—then that the pellets of beetles' wings, bones, feathers and fur are heaped in the nest, making it more soft and comfortable, for as often as every five minutes the parent birds return to the nest bearing the fruit of their search. Through their agency, every ten or fifteen minutes a destructive mouse goes to his reward, and the hungry owlets in the tree are filled with gustatory gladness. Much food is required by the growing nestlings, and, as they become older, bones and feathers are just as necessary a part of it as the flesh, for it has been proven that owls cannot live on boneless meat.

Even though food should prove scarce, maternal anxiety and the infant complaints of her babes take the owl home every so often through the night that the safety of her brood may be assured. While parental devotion is at its height, the cares of motherhood are materially lightened by the unfailing fidelity of her mate, who does not spend all his time in sapiently staring at the moon, as the poets would have us believe.

The young family makes just as heavy a draft on his time as on hers. This division of labor is well, for one of them could hardly supply the wants of such a ravenous group for such an extended period as the little ones remain in the nest—nine or ten weeks; at least, it is that long before they leave the branches immediately surrounding their home.

The rising sun causes the owl, with feathers bedraggled



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

YOUNG ACADIAN OWL

“One of the little ones, dozing on a limb, will look like
nothing more than a sleepy small boy in his ‘nighties.’”

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and wet with dew, to seek shelter for the day on a limb close to the bole of some dense tree, where, after making an indifferent toilet, she sits with elongated body and close-drawn feathers, looking quite like the weather-worn bark. Thus she escapes the notice of the feathered hordes who might attack her. After a close search here is where we are most likely to find her, with tail close pressed to the limb in the shrinking but vertical attitude common to all owls, faithfully standing guard over the nest.

If we are fortunate enough to find in the evergreens the different members of an Acadian family in a secluded spot favorable to thought, the mother, with wide-open eyes, will be the picture of wisdom and a fit companion for Minerva or Pallas Athene, while one of the little ones, dozing on a nearby limb, will look like nothing more than a sleepy small boy in his "nighties"; and the sound he makes will tell you plainly that he prefers the sandman's presence to yours. If you are gentle and sympathetic with him, however, he may reward you by showing his confidence in you by going to sleep in your hand—this "little downy owl."

With feathers fluffed out the owl looks as large and comfortable as other birds, though she is really nothing but feathers and bones. This is why she seems so buoyant in flight, with no suggestion of weight, and why with body contracted she moves so silently along, her soft, light feathers never cutting the air and making such sounds as are made by the heavier birds with stiffer feathers. With no flesh on her bones, perhaps "the owl for all her feathers *is* a-cold."

The eye of the owl is set solidly in its socket and is not movable like the eyes of other birds; and for this reason, when looking at anything it is necessary for her to move her whole head from side to side—a habit no doubt for which

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she is accredited in some localities with being a metamorphosed weaver.

Throughout the ages no bird—with the exception of the raven—has claimed the interest of or had a greater influence upon man than the owl, and even to those entirely devoid of superstition there is no sound in all nature so capable of calling up a horde of nameless fears as the weird cry of this strange creature haunting the moonlight and the dusk, whose presence lends a picturesque note to the landscape and calls into being fancies of ruins and desolation.

When the nature lover goes out under the stars to enjoy the purifying, uplifting moonlight, and to listen to the pleasure-yielding voices of the night—crickets tuning their violins, frogs singing in far-away marshes, the humming of moths, the call of the katydid—each separate and distinct, with their almost imperceptible undersong of the blended voices of countless smaller insects and the soft sound of leaves and grasses swayed by the breezes—the influences of the hour awaken poetic fancies, which bear him away from earth and its cares into the ethereal realm of dreams.

Suddenly the spell of exaltation—or possibly it may be only a feeling of tranquil enjoyment—is broken by a sound coming out of the shadows and reminding him of the terrors of the night, before unthought of; then the nocturnal wanderer, even though he knows that the warning shriek is but voicing the unconscious memory of a long-ago past, is thankful that home is near and hurriedly seeks safety in its shelter.

“It was the owl that shrieked; the fatal bellman
Which gives the sternest ‘good-night.’”



Photograph by James H. Miller

SCREECH OWL AWAKE AND ASLEEP

"The eye of the owl is set solidly in the socket, and is not movable like the eyes of other birds; and for this reason when looking at anything it is necessary for her to move her head from side to side."

I took the wren's nest;
Heaven forgive me!
Its merry architects so small
Had scarcely finished their wee hall,
That, empty still, and neat and fair,
Hung idly in the summer air.
The mossy walls, the dainty door,
Where Love should enter and explore,
And Love sit caroling outside,
And Love within chirp multiplied—
I took the wren's nest;
Heaven forgive me!

How many hours of happy pains
Through early frosts and April rains,
How many songs at eve and morn
O'er springing grass and greening corn,
What labors hard, through sun and shade,
Before the pretty house was made!
One little minute, only one,
And she'll fly back, and find it—gone!
I took the wren's nest;
Bird, forgive me!

DINAH MARIA MULOCK.

ORIGIN OF THE WREN

IN the far-away time when marvelous things occurred, one day, as an impetuous youth of Heidelberg lay idly dreaming and pondering under an oak, a beautiful maiden crept forth from a great hole in the trunk of the tree and stood smiling at him. The youth immediately arose and made love to her, as was the custom in those days, and his love was immediately returned, and they promised to be true to each other forever and ever. But the maiden confided to him that she belonged to the race of Dryads and warned him that on that account he must never show anger to her—even a slight manifestation of this malignant passion would entail on her a diminution in size; and anything like violent rage would reduce her to a limit from which there could be no recovery.

All went well with the lovers till one evening he, coming much earlier than usual to the tryst—though he thought it was later—found no maiden at the trysting place, whereupon he fell into a wrathful passion and uttered bitter words.

When at the proper moment the maiden weepingly appeared she at once began to shrink and continued shrinking till she was no larger than a mouse. Wishing to escape from one who had so wronged her, her wishes gave her wings, when, as a wren, with an angry chirp, she flew away.

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Another story is told in many lands of how a wren, possibly a descendant of this one—for it surely had human intelligence—became the king of birds.

It was resolved in the time "when men were as animals and animals as men" that he should be king who could fly the highest. The eagle, who everyone thought would win, in full confidence of victory, immediately began his flight toward the sun. When he had distanced all his competitors and his strength was spent, in a loud voice he announced his monarchy over all things with wings.

A crafty wren, who had hidden among the eagle's feathers, emerged, and, flying a little higher, called in a shrill, jubilant voice: "Birds, look up and behold your king!"

The other birds allowed the claim of the wren, who was duly installed in office, when the angry eagle, exasperated at the decision, caught the wren in his talons, and, flying almost out of sight, dropped him to the earth. The wren, more frightened than hurt, when he had gathered himself together and taken an inventory of his injuries, discovered that he had suffered no loss except a piece of his tail, which was broken off in the fall. Derisively flipping the expressive stub, he flew to the highest bough of a great elm and sang an exultant song.



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

WREN SCOLDING

WREN LIFE

THE story does not say that the Heidelberg youth, too, was transformed into a wren, but it must have been that the Dryad wren's angry chirp caused him, also, to grow small, for when she comes out of the hole in the tree to-day the lover who keeps tryst with her is as small as a mouse and quite like herself in every way. Besides, did they not promise to be true to each other forever and ever? And the hole in the tree, too, is smaller! What changes has anger wrought!

It was early in April when they arrived, too early for any great abundance of insect life, their principal food, to be abroad, but they were not seriously inconvenienced by its scarcity, for, being plump with southern feasting, their storage system made this, for the time being, a matter of minor importance.

She, attractive little body, had many admirers of her kind, and he was often compelled to defend his exclusive right to her favor. This was usually accomplished through wordy discussions—beloved of all wrens—but occasionally the retort valiant was administered by the pugnacious little lover.

As they flitted about among the trees looking for an opening, they chanced upon this deserted dwelling of a chickadee family, who, for some reason, had sought other

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quarters. The new home did not exactly coincide with the original plans and specifications of the old Heidelberg days, but it was far better suited to their needs—and to their changed conditions.

Immediately they set to work to furnish it in accordance with wren tastes. From daylight till dark they worked. If there be merit in activity, the banner for worth undoubtedly belongs to the wren! All sorts of things they carried into it—sticks, straws, rags, paper, anything they could find—till the cavity was almost filled; then, last of all, feathers enough to make a comfortable feather bed were carried in, and the establishment was complete.

In this particular case—as in most others—the little dame seemed to be the head of the family, for it was she who carried most of the material, and she who arranged all of it. Was it because of her earlier creation that she was permitted to take the initiative?—or because she enjoyed the work? It certainly was not on account of indolence on the part of her spouse, for while she was making this home, he, capricious little builder, made another nest in the near neighborhood. Was this due to the unsatisfied building instinct in him, or did he think it might be best for him to have a home of his own, in readiness for a possible second choice in case anything should happen to the present sharer of his joys and sorrows?

During the ten days that our little wren sat in her lichened mansion, her musical mate often enlivened the tedium of the moment by treating her to a delightful serenade as he swung on a bough beneath her window—or by bringing to her choice tidbits in the shape of plump spiders or luscious grasshoppers. These he carried in his beak as he climbed the tree exactly as a mouse would climb. It was easy then



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

WRENS AT HOME

"Bringing to her choice tidbits . . . which he carried in his beak as he climbed the tree exactly as a mouse would have done."

WREN LIFE

to believe with the Icelandic that he is the mouse's brother. During the whole time of his mate's sitting on the nest, he faithfully ministered to her necessities and jealousy guarded their home against all intruders.

These tiny creatures are seldom mute for long at a time. Hopping about among the branches, peering under leaves and looking into crevices, they stop every now and then to send up their shrill, vibrating songs. The wren is no mean musician. In a musical contest the eagle would never have been accorded first honors even for a moment.

At the noonday woodland concert given by the wren, thrush, catbird, ovenbird and bobolink, when most other birds are silent, the wren—possibly because he is nearer than any of the others—seems to be the leader of the chorus, as his gladsome trill rises higher and clearer than all the rest. And often throughout the day he flies to a lofty bough and there, atilt on a branch, pours forth his soul in music—his whole body atremble with the fervor of his song. With open bill pointed toward the sky he sends his trilling notes upward; then, as if moved more and more by the gladness of the springtime, with the wildest abandon he scatters reverberating notes about him, filling the grove with that melody which, to a bird lover, is one of the chief charms of summer.

The concert season of this cheery little minstrel does not close with the springtime; for full six months he sings. Those who have never been moved by the song of a bird have surely never had wrens nesting on their premises.

On the morning when the first baby chirps were heard in the nest, the little wren father sang with hysterical gladness from the topmost bough of a nearby elm. The song was so like the triumphant music of Eastertide that the new life in the nest must have inspired it; though it may have

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

been that the balmy summer morning, with its incense-laden breezes, drew the song from his throat; or possibly he was just so full of music he must needs express it. Who knows?

When it came to providing for a family, the little fellow began to show the effects of a purposeless youth spent in lolling about on the Heidelberg grass. It is useless to deny it. He was a poor provider, allowing his mate to bring every scrap of food that went into the begging mouths of their hungry brood. With him, concentrated effort seemed impossible. Though he was active enough, his activities were nearly always misdirected. All his domestic energies seemed to have been spent in the building of the superfluous nest. The little ones seemed to interest him for a time—he occasionally went to look at them—but never to the extent of providing for them. He often sang lullabies to them, to be sure, but sometimes, while he was singing these, even, the flighty little fellow—with one eye always on the main chance—broke off in the very midst of his lay to fly away after a passing insect.

Those who believe all wrens unsusceptible to the softer emotions, should watch a mother wren busying herself with the care of her nestlings. There, every move, every soft little chirp, expresses maternity. And how she works for them! On an average of once in every two and a half minutes, through the livelong day, she brings food to them, when every mouthful has done its tiny best to escape from her—for none but active, living things are deemed good enough for the wrenlets. The menu provided includes caterpillars, grasshoppers, spiders, gnats, flies, beetles, bugs, myriapods and locusts, all of which are served in the best of style; the wings and legs are removed from beetles and grasshoppers, while spiders are presented as legless balls. Being exclusive-

WREN LIFE

ly insectivorous, the wren as a gardener's assistant occupies a high place. Especially is she valuable in the orchard.

Between meals she devotes her time to looking over her brood to see that no mites from the feather lining of her nest are disturbing them—and twenty-five or thirty times each day she cleans house thoroughly.

After smoothing down the incipient feathers of her babes, as she departs on another marketing expedition she always casts a solicitous look behind; and on her return she always pauses on the threshold to survey her family as a whole before attending to their wants. With all its cares, the routine of nest life seems pleasing to this bustling little creature. Possibly having always lived within the narrow bounds of the trunk of a tree has prevented the confinement from growing irksome to her.

While his mate is so busy with household cares the little father occupies himself mainly, when not busy with his music, in annoying all other creatures about the place. The English sparrow has come in for a good share of his teasing and scolding. Nothing seems to please the little meddler more than to peck at the eggs, or to pull straws from the nest of his neighbor, with whom he is decidedly unpopular. A valiant defender of his household, when he recognizes ulterior designs on the home in the tree, on the part of frolicking squirrels, he loudly deprecates their society, expressing his anger in such a way as, in the old days, would have made them "grow smaller than a mouse," but which in these only makes them scamper away.

Often he flies to the swallows' adobe huts to give them teasing pecks—and such a busybody as he is! There is not a crack, crevice, or hole in the neighborhood, whether occupied or not, that he has not looked into. He is not the only in-

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

quisitive member of the family, however, for when his mate is not busy with her household cares, she, too, is meddling with neighborhood affairs.

But no matter how engrossed they are with affairs, whether foreign or domestic, the slightest stir in the leaf screen above them, different from the stir of the wind, always reminds them that there are babes in the nest and that they are their defenders. If a squirrel or blue-jay happens to be the disturber, a quick touch on the brush or a peck in the back from one of these little feathered creatures is enough to cause a retreat. Occasionally a clawed paw grazes the saucy tail of one of them, but not often.

However much the wren may enjoy nest life her reign there is brief, for soon her infant brood grows large enough and soon they are possessed of the proper equipment of feathers to render a larger field more desirable. On leaving the nest the uncertain and fitful flight of the little ones is guided for a few days by the parents, ever on the alert to prevent them in their fear from scrambling into rat-holes or other dangerous places—to a young wren any sort of hole is a place of safety. As he grows older he learns that those on the ground are an exception, likely to be occupied by enemies.

At nightfall, the wrenlets are guided to low trees or bushes, which they climb in their mouse-like way—while they are yet too weak to fly up as well as down. But as wrens develop rapidly, in a day or two they will be able to fly almost anywhere, and in a few more days they will have the ability to not only go where they choose, but also to assume their own support, thus leaving their parents to devote themselves to their own pleasures.

Before the summer is over we will see these fledglings,

WREN LIFE

like their most remote ancestors, flying into passions at nothing, their whole bodies atremble with rage at the slightest provocation. They will grow up to be just as loyal to those they love—while their love lasts—and just as troublesome to their enemies. They will be just as saucy, intrepid, jealous, strategic, opinionated, active and musical as they, but any one who is the least bit observing will see that each of them, like his elders, has his own individuality; each has his own characteristic way of flipping his tail, of chirping, of expressing tenderness and of annoying his neighbors.

As the season advances, mutual attachment between the older pair dies out. Had we been more familiar with the ways of wrens in general we would have known from the beginning that theirs was a love destined to wane with the season.

Yet whatever their faults, it is with regret that we notice coming into their voices the autumn cricket's tone, for it tells us plainly that the time of their departure is near—that the wander-thirst is upon them. When they leave, whether together or separately, they will journey by easy stages toward the summer land of Mexico, where they will not only escape the severity of our winters, but will have their voices freshened for another concert season among us. Our little wren, like other singing birds, will leave us in the daytime—he never travels at night. On his departure for that softer clime, as we catch a farewell glimpse of his flashing, flitting presence, his last reverberating warble will awaken in our hearts an echoing trill, and a hope that in the coming spring-time, if we encourage him to settle in the old home, by way of recompense he will give us many a song.

Though these may be sung to other mates in other nests, and even though the renderings may be different, they will

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

be but variations upon the same old themes as the songs of yesteryear—songs that may never lure us, like the Manxmen of old, to watery graves in the depths of the great ocean—but songs that will lure us into the sea of dreams as we rest under shady trees as did the Heidelberg youth in the long ago.

He clasps the crag with hooked hands ;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls ;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

LEGEND OF THE EAGLE

AN old legend tells us that the eagle, the king of birds, is the one creature on earth who is able to recover departed youth; and the great age to which he is known to live lends color to the story.

It is related that when this bird feels that the season of youth is passing by and when his young are still in the nest, he leaves the aging earth and soars toward the sun, the consumer of all that is harmful. Mounting upward even to the third region of the air—the region of meteors—he circles and swings about under the great fiery ball in their midst, turning every feather to its scorching rays, then, with wings drawn back, like a meteor himself, he drops into some cold spring or into the ocean wave, there to have the heat driven inward by the soul-searching chill of its waters. Then flying to his eyrie, he nestles among his warm fledglings till, starting into perspiration, he throws off age with his feathers.

That his rejuvenescence may be complete, as his sustenance must be of youth, he makes prey of his young, feeding on the nestlings that have warmed him. He is clothed anew and youth is again his.

EAGLE LIFE

A PERCH on a tall tree, standing higher than its fellows on some rugged hill or mountain-side, with all his surroundings—trees, rocks and waters—expressing majesty and strength—with all his chosen environment in perfect harmony with the spirit of the bird, the eagle seems eminently worthy of all the honor given to him by the ancients, and of being exalted above all feathered creatures. His chosen perch, the tree on which he rests, is an expression of his staunch, uncompromising nature.

From his high watch-tower there, what wonders does he see! The making of each new day—and its passing; and the great mountains with their upthrust peaks and their quiet valleys between, changing with the successive seasons and with every passing mood of the sky. No long hours of laborious toiling up a pathless mountain-side for him that he may view a scene of grandeur; such views as mortals are permitted to see but once or twice in a lifetime—perhaps never—are spread out before him always. He sees the dawn rising from the purpled east and striking every cloud with gold and crimson and rosy purple, while the waters below multiply their lights and colors till the whole world is suffused and aglow. At noonday he gazes with unflinching eye at a scorching sun, under whose glance the grasses burn and curl up on the plains below, and later in the day he sees



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

THE EAGLE AND HIS MATE AT HOME

"Aperch on a tall tree standing higher than its fellows . . .
with all his surroundings expressing majesty and strength."

EAGLE LIFE

the watch-fires lighted in the evening sky; and when these burn low and darkness closes in, he sees the forests of pines as a green bloom on the bronze mountains—like the purple bloom on the grape—gradually sink into their dark background, leaving them black and somber—then the mountains themselves sink into and become a part of the darkness.

Again he sees the life going out of the living clouds as the sunlight leaves them—their rose and pale gold and amethyst lights purpling and graying till they are deadened and darksome as the mountains beneath them. And when the clouds have grown heavy and the storm gathers, when the fierce lightning darts about among the cleft peaks in the distance, when, as it comes nearer, great trees bend to the blast or are uprooted by its force, when all living creatures in the comparatively safe valley below are filled with terror—rabbits cowering in their burrows, field-mice seeking home shelter, the owl perching close to the trunk of her home tree, and the woodpecker scarcely daring to peep from her hole—the eagle shows no fear. Facing the storm on his solitary bough, by the flapping of his great wings he shows his enjoyment in the warfare of the elements. The fierce heart of the eagle is made glad as he defiantly faces the storm.

Compared with this, what, to him, were the conflicts of men at the head of whose armies he was borne in the years that are gone?

When he chooses to leave his lofty perch, one stroke of his mighty wings carries him far into the air, and he mounts to heights far beyond mortal vision, in ever-narrowing spirals, till he seems to disappear in the sun itself.

When again he is seen, seemingly motionless wings are bearing him along, far above the highest peaks—and beyond the mountains, where a different world lies beneath him—

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

broad valleys veined by streams that seem but curved and bent threads of silver viewed distantly—and plains whose wind-swept grasses are like the smooth waves on the surface of the quiet sea beyond the mountains.

Swinging or poised high in space, with a cloudless sky above and a panoramic earth below, he is master of the situation, for the very air is obedient to his will. Setting his tense wings to the air currents, around the great upturned bowl above he sweeps and careens and circles as if borne about by a whirlwind existing for his enjoyment; then shoots off across the hills to a point over a lake, where again he circles and swings, his keen eye all the while searching its waters, till, suddenly, dropping like some black body shot from the sky, he falls to the water, whose surface is scarcely disturbed as he rises with a great fish, slain with one grasp of his clutching talons, and bears it away to his eyrie, there to feast at leisure on his finny prey.

Solitude seems essential to eagle happiness, for these birds always prefer to make their homes among the wildest scenery, their chief haunts being about the most lonely parts of our great lakes, or amid the Rockies, though among them there is occasionally a pair who are willing to live in more thickly inhabited sections—possibly because their individual ancestors lived there when it, too, was a wilderness, for the eagle's attachment to place is strong. The only indispensable requisite is nearness to water in which fish abound.

Some eagles choose rocky ledges as building spots, while others prefer to make their homes in lofty trees. If the latter location is chosen, they are careful to select a place where there will be nothing to interfere with their free movements.

In his home the eagle is always an aristocrat, never moving about from place to place, but clinging to the an-



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick
EAGLE'S TALON

EAGLE LIFE

cestral pile as long as the location endures. The nest is constructed of broken branches and sticks two or three feet long and made more compact by the addition of weed stems, coarse grasses and sometimes roots and sod. Each succeeding year more material is added, until, after being occupied for a number of years, it is a very bulky affair, five or six feet high and four or five feet across. Unlike most other birds, eagles make their nest their home and not merely a nursery.

This majestic bird shows his kingly character in performing very little labor himself. While occasionally he goes on a fishing tour, it is usually under stress of hunger. Ordinarily he exacts tribute from the industrious osprey, his powerful but humble slave, who usually relinquishes his choicest catch on hearing the intimidating cry of his superior. When this subject fails to provide a sufficiency, the ravenous vulture is occasionally made to give of his food—sometimes even to yield from his crop that which he has swallowed to satisfy his own hunger—that this king of birds may be made comfortable, whatever the cost to his subjects. He does not spend his time in continual feasting, however, for a full repast will often last him several days.

Even in captivity the eagle does not lay aside his kingly bearing: pacing his perch in a six-foot cage, this royal, feathered pirate, with head thrown back as he looks on us with fearless, unflinching eye, has the manner of some mighty viking of old pacing the deck of his vessel. Though a captive, he will never be intimidated, never be other than a king.

Gallant and gay in their doublets gray,
All at a flash, like the darting of flame,
Chattering Arabic, African, Indian—
Certain of springtime the swallows came.

Doublets of gray silk and surcoats of purple,
And ruffs of russet round each little throat,
Wearing such garb they had crossed the waters,
Mariners sailing with never a boat.

Cleaving the clouds with their moon-edged pinions,
High over city and vineyard and mart;
April to pilot them; May speeding after;
And each bird's compass his small red heart.

EDWIN ARNOLD.

THE ORIGIN OF SWALLOWS

IN the long ago, before it had all been quite settled whether the human creatures on this earth of ours were to remain in human form or to take the form of birds and animals, or whether the birds and animals were to be changed into human creatures, a group of children at play were building mud houses on the edge of a cliff near their home, when a magic spell was cast over them, changing them into swallows—birds who would evermore spend their time in playing at children's games in the upper air and in building houses of clay.

To-day we see their homes like children's play-houses under shelving rocks, on the edges of forests, or under the eaves of our barns, or in the form of holes in sandy cliffs; and on summer evenings, as darkness descends, like earth children pursuing fireflies, we may see these aerial children darting about in the sky in pursuit of those will-o'-the-wisps of the air.

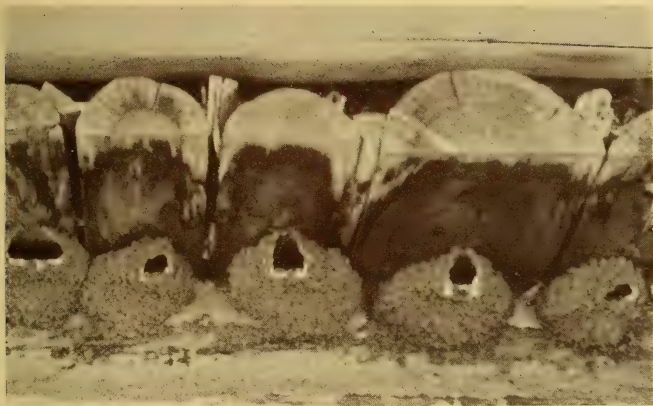
—*Eskimo Legend.*

SWALLOW LIFE

RATHER late in the springtime comes to us the most graceful of all birds, the swallow, whose flight is the poetry of motion and whose twitterings are a delightful intoxicant, the mere memory of which calls forth visions of roseate sunset skies and all the delights of summer evenings. Vernal promises may lure other birds to our groves, but not the swallow. The warmth that is enduring, and green leaves and spring blossoms which provide the insect fare upon which she subsists, must be really here before she will come to abide with us.

Of this charming family the earliest to appear are the white-breasted or tree swallows, which, with the advance of civilization, are rapidly losing the habit on which the latter name is based. Originally they built their nests only in hollow trees, but, like their cousins, the purple martins, they are gradually learning to prefer the homes provided for them by man, and their rent is paid in the service of ridding the air of insect pests.

Tree swallows with their pure-white breasts and mantles of steel-blue washed with green, are familiar figures darting and whirling above our marshes, dipping into and skimming the surface of their waters, collecting the insects which swarm there. As flocks of them whirl and eddy about in ever-



Photograph by Edward Warren

NESTS OF CLIFF SWALLOWS UNDER
EAVES OF CABIN

SWALLOW LIFE

narrowing circles above the ponds, they seem to be herding the insect swarms for more convenient capture.

Later in the season the attractive young of this species are seen perching in groups among the bushes or sunning themselves on dead or leafless branches.

Between the middle and the last week of April the barn swallow, the most familiar and the most gaily robed member of the family, comes to make her home on the rafters or underneath the eaves of our barns, where she rears her twittering young. The forehead and gorget of chestnut—the faded bloodstain evidencing an ancient crime—differentiate her from other swallows, as does also the more pronounced fork of the tail and the deep buff below the chestnut breast.

If the vicissitudes of the winter have not rendered this impossible, on returning to her haunts of other summers she hastens to repair the battered masonry of her home of yesteryear. This home, among many others of its kind, is built of row upon row of pellets of mud and straw held together by the glutinous saliva of the bird, and lined with fine grass and poultry feathers, the latter usually overflowing the nest.

While the swallow is sitting, her mate treats her with remarkable tenderness, feeding and caressing her, and even relieving her in the task of incubation for short periods when she flies abroad for needed exercise and in quest of insect food. In eleven days the young appear and are carefully tended by both parents.

In two weeks' time the birdlings are able to leave the nest, and in another week or two are self-supporting or partially so. Even after they are able to take long flights the parents are occasionally seen meeting them in mid-air, and, after apparently touching the beaks of their young with their own, dart off in another direction. We are told by

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those who ought to know that in this demonstration, seemingly a caress, the young are being given extra food by their more proficient parents.

The cliff swallow, not quite so common, yet very generally distributed over North America, may easily be distinguished from the barn swallow, which it resembles in color, by the shortness of its tail. The tail of this swallow is only slightly forked. She may be further identified by a patch of brown on the back at the base of the tail. The more or less retort-shaped nest of this bird is built of mud, supposedly agglutinated, without straw. Great numbers of these are attached to cliffs in the more unsettled portions of the country, but where the region is more thickly inhabited they are fastened under the eaves of buildings much as hornets' nests are.

The brown-backed bank swallow and the rough-winged differ from the others so greatly in color that it is not hard to distinguish them—besides, they are much smaller. At a distance, a party of the former flying about, in and out of the entrance of their homes, look much like swarming bees.

The glossy blue-black purple martin, one of the most attractive of swallows, and familiar to every one who has ever lived in the country, is one of our most useful birds. According to Mr. Ridgeway, one pair of these will destroy more harmful insects in a season than all the English sparrows in a township would kill in a lifetime. Unfortunately, the alien sparrow is driving this beautiful and useful bird away from our homes. Since the advent of this most disagreeable and quarrelsome of birds, many martins have deserted the boxes where they have made their homes for decades.

In spots where cattle gather, or on hot summer days



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

YOUNG CLIFF OR EAVE SWALLOWS

“The attractive young of this species are seen perching in groups among the bushes, or sunning themselves on dead or leafless branches.”

SWALLOW LIFE

where they stand knee-deep in deliciously cooling, shadowy pools, their comfort is greatly increased by groups of these aerial voyagers—barn swallows or martins if near homes, or white-breasted swallows if in marsh-cornered meadows—sailing about overhead, darting here and there and dipping down to take on the wing the pestiferous insects that constantly annoy the herd.

The one fault of these graceful birds is that they are notoriously poor housekeepers. With the exception of the disagreeable sparrow and some birds of prey, most birds carry away from their homes every scrap of uncleanness—every bit of refuse food and every loose feather. But it is not so with the swallow. The delights of flitting about in the air and clearing it of all life save their own are too alluring to admit of their spending any of their time in the laborious task of housecleaning. Possibly good housekeeping is more than ought to be expected of children transformed—for such they are—with no cares to disturb them. Their food, even, is provided for them. All they seem to have to do is to leave their broad mouths wide open as they fly about, and their nourishment enters as they pass through the air. Every click of the bill as it closes tells that the career of some tiny creature is ended. Of course a few smaller mollusks are picked up and eaten as the birds amuse themselves about wet places, but their gathering is but child's play, as is the building of the mud houses.

No more gregarious birds than these can be found anywhere. Who ever heard of a solitary swallow? All varieties live in colonies, and even in their longest flights they keep together. The young, on leaving the nest, never disband, as do many other birds, but keep constantly together, young barn swallows on some projecting piece of timber, martins

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

about the home box, and tree swallows on some convenient bush.

Wherever we see them—floating in mid-air over grazing or homing herds, or wheeling about through the overhanging mists of mosquitoes above stagnant pools, or with momentary touches of breast or wing-tips breaking the glassy surface of ponds into myriads of infinitesimal waves—they challenge our admiration. The grace of the swallow shows itself even in the mixing of her clay; as she turns and sways and stirs, her slender wings are held daintily above all pollution. Even though at times she must needs come down to earth, she is never of the earth.

In the early morning we see hundreds of these beautiful birds sitting about and pluming themselves on telephone or telegraph wires, which would seem bare as leafless boughs without them. Here they have spent the night with heads tucked under deafening wings, that shut out the requiems chanted by the resonant voices of mosquitoes and other insects for the hosts of their slain kindred whose brief lives have ended on the day just past. And in the evening gloam they course about in the air as high as eye can see—apparently for the mere pleasure and exhilaration of being in the air—and of it—then swinging low and dipping down to the very surface of streams and ponds in pursuit of insects, aerial and aquatic—then again taking longer flights, apparently pursuing only each other.

In autumn, when the blended greens of grove and field have changed to crimson and gold and brown, and the hum of insect wings is growing more and more faint, we notice the swallows coursing and speeding about over farmyards and meadows in larger groups, their numbers augmented by the broods of summer; and when we see them staying more



YOUNG BANK SWALLOWS

"The young on leaving the nest, never disband, but keep constantly together."

Photograph by James H. Miller

SWALLOW LIFE

and more closely together we know that preparation is being made for the fall migration and that the hour of their departure is about to strike. Some day soon we may expect a group of them—possibly the rough-winged or the martins—coursing and whirling in ever-widening circles, then mounting higher and starting for some perpetual summer land—probably tropical America—where insects are always humming.

On their way they will stop for brief rests among the bayberries, which afford them both food and shelter—then on strong wings covering ninety or a hundred miles an hour—continue their journey. Soon they will be followed by other groups, till the haunts that knew them are deserted and we are left with only a memory of their happy, child-like, twittering voices and their graceful, rhythmic flight.

The swallow has no song—and needs none; her elusive, suggestive twitter sets chords in ourselves to vibrating that awaken harmonies not of sound alone, but so blended with color and motion that they are far more beautiful than any mere outside song could ever be. Yet they are not wholly within ourselves, for, having in them all the delightful sounds and odors of a summer evening—all the glowing, permeating, vanishing colors and shifting shadows of sunset skies—they carry us out of self.

As the twitterings of these loving and lovable birds bring back to us a flood of recollections of a happy childhood, when flitting, flickering fireflies were will-o'-the-wisps to be followed about the dewy orchard with its fruity odors, we bless the fairy who gave to these graceful, happy creatures not only a perpetual childhood, but the power to recall in us our own childhood—even though it be but for a moment.

The flying rumors gathered as they rolled,
Scarce any tale was sooner heard than told,
And all who told it added something new,
And all who heard it made enlargement, too;
In every ear it spread, on every tongue it grew.

POPE.

THE ORIGIN OF MAGPIES

ON the authority of Ovid, magpies were the discontented, tale-bearing daughters of Pierus, who were changed into birds for their garrulity. When the curse fell upon them, endeavoring to speak and, with great clamor, to menace with their insolent hands, they beheld quills growing out of their nails, dusky feathers springing from their arms, and each saw the face of the other shooting out into a hard beak, as these new birds were added to the wood. When in their alarm they frantically beat their breasts they were elevated by the motion and hung poised in the air as magpies, the scandal of the groves. And even though their forms were changed, their talkativeness remained, and their garrulity and enormous love of chattering.

LEGEND OF THE MAGPIE'S NEST-BUILDING

ACCORDING to an old story, the magpie was the last bird to learn nest-building. When it became necessary for her to establish a home, though she was proud and arrogant, she finally put away her pride to the extent of asking the other birds to give her some instruction in the art. In their generosity they agreed and assembled on the appointed day to assist her.

The materials having been collected, the blackbird, taking up a twig, said: "Place that stick there," and laid it in place. "Ah!" said the conceited magpie, "I knew that before." Each of the other birds there assembled followed with useful suggestions, demonstrating every step, but all through the lesson the heedless magpie chattered: "Ah! I knew that before. Ah! I knew that before."

At length, when the nest was but half completed, and the patience of her instructors entirely exhausted, they said with one voice: "Well, Mistress Mag, since you know all about it you may build your nest yourself."

From that day on, no bird of the wood would allow the foolish magpie to see her building her own nest, even, and so it is that magpies, ever since, have built ramshackle nests.



Photograph by Edward Warren

THE MAGPIE, THE SCANDAL OF THE GROVE

"A pied bird perches on a branch that bends with his
weight as he balances himself with his beautiful tail."

MAGPIE LIFE

IN almost any of the valleys among our western mountains one is likely to find these beautiful and entertaining birds in their fullest perfection. As the chance visitor sits rapt in admiration of the distant peaks and passes with the marvelous lights and shadows upon them, suddenly his dream is disturbed by a living streak of black and white passing across the foreground of the picture, as a pied bird perches on a nearby branch that bends with his weight as he balances himself with the beautiful tail that served him as a rudder in his sail across the sky. With every motion of the branch it now tips gracefully up and down, allowing countless iridescent hues to chase each other over its glossy surface.

His broad patches of perfect color are glorified by the sunlight playing upon them, the immaculate white being given a snowy depth, while over the darker areas of his dazzling plumage elusive metallic greens and purples and blues stroked by delicate rose and amethyst are made to pass in quick succession.

All unconscious of his human observer, the charming bird, full of the spirit of the springtime, utters a tender, beseeching strain not intended for mortal ears, and seldom heard by them. This song, sung only when the bird believes himself to be alone with his kind, comes as a glad surprise,

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for it is utterly at variance with anything which has ever been written about him.

Without waiting for a reply, the gaily-clad minstrel flies off with a stop or two to another tree, where he is joined by a mate as beautiful as himself, then quickly follows the chatter for which their tribe is famous. Though they are soon out of sight, the gossip continues, now coming from one part of the grove, now from another. Evidently the pair have been joined by others, for such a volume of chatter is certainly beyond the power of any two birds, however much they may be interested in neighborhood affairs.

It was doubtless this obtrusive, bleating chatter, as well as their senseless shrieking cries in flight, that gave rise to the ancient belief that magpies were companions of Bacchus, with tongues loosed by wine, who continued their revel even in the absence of the bibulous god. With penetrating eyes and ears alert, together with the keen intelligence possessed by these birds, it is possible that they may be discussing affairs of moment rather than the trivialities supposed to interest them. Perhaps the pair who refused to enter the ark and who remained outside perched on the roof-tree, supposedly gossiping, were talking to some purpose. There were times when Noah was not as discerning as he might have been, and even our interpretation of the language of the magpie of to-day is wholly out of keeping with the mental strength of the bird.

Seldom are magpies seen alone. Usually, except during the nesting period, they go about in pairs or, in late summer, with their families of the season. When foraging, they bound over the ground with charming grace, stopping now and then to tug at a worm, after the manner of our friends the robins.



Photograph by Edward Warren

MAGPIE'S NEST

"The ramshackle nest, an immense structure of sticks and mud, resembling a great tumble weed."

MAGPIE LIFE

While picking their way among the wet grasses and low herbage or over muddy places, their beautiful tails, as their most precious treasures, are held daintily aloft, and free from all pollution, as the birds search for snails, caterpillars, young mice and frogs. Occasionally they mount the backs of grazing cattle to feed on the flies that molest them, but usually they do not wander far from the thick shrubby growths, where they seek cover on the approach of enemies, real or supposed, and into which, on scenting danger, they disappear as stealthily as cat-birds or cuckoos. It is here that their homes may be found.

The ramshackle nest, wholly incompatible with either the fastidiousness or the intelligence of the bird, is an immense structure of mingled sticks and mud indiscriminately arranged, somewhat resembling one of the great tumble weeds of the western plains, placed several feet from the ground among thick masses of oak brush or similar growths in the wilder regions, or, where civilization has encroached on natural territory, in some fruit tree.

That her seclusion may be more complete and to protect herself and young against the incursions of predatory birds, the magpie covers her dwelling with a dome of twigs, leaving two openings at opposite sides for entrance and exit. As she sits with her head at one, her unspreed tail sometimes protrudes visibly from the other, betraying her whereabouts at a time when she is especially desirous of escaping notice.

Like the robin, this bird often reconstructs the old nest from year to year, and, like the wren, she often builds sham nests, either for the purpose of diverting attention from the one occupied, or to live in should accident befall.

Though the magpie is possessed of traits that are far from admirable—as a petty thief she has fairly won the name

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of "egg-lift," and her fondness for a meat diet has made her a murderess of even large animals—her unfailing grace and beauty are bound to challenge our admiration, and to add life and charm to the landscape. We admire her, too, as an example of superior motherhood. Zealously she plies her young with food while in the nest, and diligently she devotes herself to their education during their first summer.

When reared from the nest, the magpie makes a most interesting pet who delights in following and entertaining her owner, but mature captives have little value. There is scarcely a community within her range of residence that does not boast one of these pitiful prisoners, but how different she is from those in their natural environment. "All *her* merry quips are o'er." Gone is her gaiety. Gone, too, is the beautiful iridescent wash from her plumage. The once snowy patches are sullied and the once beautiful tail, her erstwhile pride, is limp, dulled and bedraggled, a thing of rags and tatters. Yet it expresses her condition as eloquently as it did in the jaunty care-free days in the wood. And all this has been brought upon her by her accomplishments!

As man in the old days proclaimed her the scandal of the grove, she in her present estate proclaims him—who has so misunderstood her and so degraded her—the real deserver of the title.



Photograph by Edward Warrer

YOUNG MAGPIES JUST OUT OF THE NEST

When musing on companions gone,
We doubly feel ourselves alone.

SCOTT—*Marmion*.

THE ORIGIN OF THE KINGFISHER

THE beautiful love story of Ceyx and Halcyone has been handed down to us through the ages.

He, the brave and handsome young Thessalian king, son of the Morning Star, and his gentle and beautiful wife, Halcyone, daughter of the wind god, Eolus, gave to each other such love as few ever know. Each to the other was dearer than life—to her he was the wisest and bravest of mortals, while, to him, she was as beautiful as the morning.

During the first days they spent together no discord marred their happiness, no cloud darkened their sky—all was joy and brightness.

After a time, dire misfortune came to the family of Ceyx—misfortunes which he believed to be indicative of the displeasure of the gods. Not knowing what to do to appease them, he decided to consult the oracle of Apollo. This necessitated a long and dangerous voyage to Clares in Ionia.

On telling Halcyone of his intention, a deathly paleness came over her. Jealousy, which ever gnaws at the vitals of those who love deeply, now tortured her till she cried out in agony: "What fault of mine has turned you from me? Where now is the love you once gave? Have you learned to feel comfortable with Halcyone away?"

Then with honeyed words she endeavored to dissuade him. Finding these of no avail, she told him of the dangers

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awaiting him upon the waters. The disasters which she pictured were not born of idle fancy. Having lived in the cave of Eolus, and having often witnessed the violence of the winds, she knew whereof she spoke. She told him of the direful work of the winds, which rushed together with such fury that fire flashed from the conflict; and of their battles with the waves; then, seeing that her Ceyx was not to be turned aside, she said: "If you must go, take me with you, for if I am left behind I shall suffer not only the real dangers which you pass through, but those also which my fears suggest."

Ceyx was greatly troubled, for he also wished that she might go with him, but he loved her too dearly to expose her to the dangers which he knew he must encounter. Assuring her of his enduring love, he left her with this promise: "By the rays of my father, the day-star, if fate permits, I will return before the moon shall have twice rounded her orb." With sobs and with weeping, the young wife clung to him until the men at the oars were ready to pull out into the waters, and he could linger no longer.

With tearful eyes she watched him wave a last farewell as his barque went out across the ocean. Not until its hull was lost to sight, and the sails, even, had disappeared, did she return to their lonely abode, where everything reminded her of the departed loved one. The long days which followed were made dark by forebodings and tears.

Ceyx, too, was lonely and longed to turn back where love was calling, but duty bade him go—so away from home and happiness and safety he sailed. Yet, though there was a tumult in his heart, he felt no fear for his own safety, for the sea was calm.

But, when midway between the two lands, as night is



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

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fast coming down, a great storm arises. The orders of the master to his men are unheard because of the mighty noise of winds and waves. Each man tries to do what seems to him is best, but their efforts are in vain, for the heavens and the sea seem to have united to destroy them. The clouds come down in great sheets to the waves, which rise to meet them; winds beat about them on every side. The noise is deafening, and the light from the conflict blinding, as it comes to them through the inky blackness of the night. Powerless of themselves, all call on the gods for aid, and think of the loved ones at home and of the pledges left behind. Ceyx calls on his father, the day-star, and on the father of Halcyone, the wind god, but they are deaf to his entreaties—and all through his prayer runs the name of Halcyone, the one for whom his heart yearns, yet for whose absence he is thankful. Finally, as the vessel is torn asunder and the very pieces beaten into the turbulent waters, as he clings to a spar he prays that the waves may bear his lifeless form to her. As a great wave tears him from the spar and he goes down into the dark water, last on his lips is the name of Halcyone.

She, at home—full of fears—is counting the days till his promised return. The garments which he loved to see her wear are made ready to be worn—as are the garments which he shall wear. Ceaselessly she prays to the gods—to one for his safety and return, to another for his success—but most often to Juno, to whom the wives of that day prayed that their husbands might remain faithful. Long she beseeches that he may meet no one who could become dearer to him than herself.

At length, Juno, knowing of the fate which had befallen the absent one, and in sympathy with the pleadings of his

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troubled wife, sends her messenger, Iris, to the great god, Somnus, asking that a vision, in the form of Ceyx, be sent to Halcyone to tell of the dread happening. Hearing her message, Somnus sends his messenger to do her bidding. In the form of her loved one, Morpheus leans over the bed of the sleeping Halcyone and tells her of all the circumstances of the wreck—how, to the last, the thoughts of her loved one had been with her, and how all that was mortal of him would come back to her on the waves.

Crying out: "Ceyx is dead! This it was that my presaging mind foreboded," her cries awake her. The night is spent in grief and tortures of the mind. When the first light of day appears she hastens to the shore that she may be there ready to receive her returning Ceyx. Before her mind passes every scene of their life together. It was here that this occurred, and here that—and here that he gave her his last kiss. With such mixed pleasure and torture she awaits his coming. As with many prayers she begs that her life may be taken, that her spirit may be with his, she looks out across the waters and searches every wave for the loved form.

The gods take pity on her. Borne by the waves, the dead form is coming, and, seeing it in the distance, a shudder runs through her frame as she reaches out her arms, which take the shape of wings, bearing her to him. She is no longer a woman, but a bird—the halcyon. Ceyx, too, takes on this form and rises from the waves to meet her, and they fly away together across the water, there to make a home on its bosom. No more will they be separated. During the building of their home and the time for its enjoyment, beautiful days are given them, days when the waves are still and only gentle zephyrs stir the air, and the whole world is bathed in warm, golden light—halcyon days.

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IN a hole in a bank beside a lonely road the little kingfishers first saw the light—if blind creatures, born in a pocket in the earth, could be said to see light. At any rate, that was where they cast off their shelly coverings—six helpless, homely kingfisher infants.

Their house was a simple one, merely a narrow passageway with a slight upward slant leading back into the bank for a distance of four or five feet, terminating in a single vaulted chamber, six or seven inches high and less than a foot across. A modest dwelling, surely, yet snug and comfortable.

The elder pair had selected the spot, an ideal one from a kingfisher's point of view, shortly after their return from the South in the spring. Its seclusion would render it secure against the depredations of boys, while the steepness of the bank would make it impervious to the incursions of hawks, owls, snakes, weasels and other callers whose visits would be likely to result in casualties.

Keenly alive to the advantages of safety, they would have chosen this spot for these reasons alone, though they realized it had other attractions as well.

A few feet from the foot of the bank was a pond, or bayou, partly grown up with rushes and purple flags, furnishing an abiding place for the many forms of animal life which these pioneers knew full well how to appreciate. And

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only a short flight as they saw it, or little more than a stone's throw from a human point of view, was a sluggish stream plentifully peopled with fish—small fry, to be sure, but large enough to answer their needs perfectly. They, themselves, were not over a foot in length, so what did they care for a larger catch?

Over both pond and stream hung trees with long, outreaching branches—some of them alluringly bare—such watch-towers as nature, only, could construct. In the early morning the sun shone on the bank where their home was to be, and in the afternoon a beautiful tree cast a deep shade over it.

Then, too, the chosen place was in the neighborhood of their childhood's home; not in the same bank—a railroad had demolished that—but so near that either of them by taking a short flight could view the scenes of childhood. Altogether it seemed an ideal location for a home. With many a rattling chuckle the pair congratulated themselves on the good fortune which had led them to it.

When it came to building their dwelling—or digging it, for their ways were not the ways of human creatures—both took a hand—or claw—in the work. Sociologists would have us believe that division of labor in the family is a product of modern times. In the bird world it has been a custom throughout the ages. There a wife is neither a drudge nor a mere idler or entertainer, but a true companion and helpmeet, manifesting her love by always doing her share toward making a home and providing for the family.

For two long weeks both birds were occupied in excavating the gallery, taking turn about at their task, stopping only for refreshments and needed sleep. Though the work was hard they cared little for that, for were they not looking for-



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

KINGFISHER EXCAVATING THE DWELLING

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ward to better times? Though the future held many sorrows in store for them they could not foresee them. The joys, only, they anticipated, thus doubling their happiness.

When their establishment was completed it was snug, warm and comfortable, a home for any weather. After six white eggs were laid, there began a long and weary season of staying at home for the little dame, compelled by necessity to spend much of her time in keeping the eggs warm. In this, even, she was assisted by her mate, who shared in the duties of incubation.

The air was bad and the place dark, with no means of ventilating or lighting it. She could reach out in any direction and touch the wall. Talk of narrow environment! The mere thought of such living would be unendurable to a human creature, but the kingfishers viewed the matter in an entirely different light. The place was as comfortable as they could make it, and the only sort of a home suitable for the needs of the infant brood soon to dwell there. When the little dame's bones ached too much from occupying the cramped position necessary, she went outside for a little while to stretch her weary limbs, and, incidentally, caught a fish or two, breathed in a little ozone, and viewed the beautiful outside world, where later in the season she hoped to find much enjoyment with her family.

For her spouse it was a season of equal loneliness. Though he kept the eggs warm while she was out on brief vacations, during the greater part of the day he sat on a bough of a neighboring tree, usually silent and motionless, but, now and then, when fish were scarce, he left his post long enough to capture an insect or field-mouse careless enough to come within range. Whenever seen he was certain to be alone, and if on his perch, with eyes fixed on the water. Oc-

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asionally his solitary vigil was broken by a plunge into its depths.

After nearly every plunge he came up, apparently dry, with a fish, which, after compressing the life out of with his mighty bill, he either swallowed head first or carried to his lonely mate in the tunnel in the bank. A shrill, rattling sound announced the catch, while a similar but softer rattle told his companion of his coming. Then a rattle told of his departure on another excursion, which was sure to be a profitable one, for, as his name implies, he was a king among fishers. His grave and dignified bearing gave evidence to the fact that this was no misnomer. Some of his finny captives were as large as himself, though rarely. These were mutilated by his sharp-edged bill and pounded into softness against some limb or stone, then taken into his great throat. It made little difference to him that the fish could not all be swallowed at once. Without further mutilation he took in as much of it as his internal construction would allow, then waited; he was used to waiting. When his own digestion made it possible for him to complete the transaction, he gave another gulp, and the captive was seen no more. Younger kingfishers might need assistance in getting their acquisitions under cover, but not he.

His family line was a long one, dating back to the time when the gods dwelt on Olympus, and, if tradition could be credited, the gods themselves were implicated in the founding of the family. Since that time not one of its representatives had done aught to bring disgrace upon the name. Though its history had been marked by many a tragedy, no act of one of its members had made any of the line ashamed.

Every kingfisher mother pointed with pride to her mate and taught her family to follow his example in all things.

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They were unlike other scions of royalty in that industry was a marked trait among them—industry fortified by intelligence, and supplemented by vigilance and loyalty.

None but a wife prejudiced by love could call the lone fisherman handsome. Though his colors were attractive—grayish-blue with touches of white, and broad belt of a deeper shade—there was something wrong with his architecture. His head seemed too large for his body; his bill, the Greek nose of his ancestors, was far too large for his face; and his eyes were undeniably beady, giving him a crafty appearance. He wore a crown, to be sure, as befitted one of his station, but it was often rakishly awry. And, worst of all, he walked on his *legs*, clear up to his drumsticks, instead of on his feet.

But, like a dutiful wife, his mate never noticed the unattractive points about him, but, instead, was wont to dwell on his sterling qualities. Indeed, as far as appearances were concerned, she herself was not unlike him, except that her belt was different in color. Like all wives and daughters of her race she was girdled by a band of reddish chestnut.

As she sat in her darkened room she was often cheered by visits from her consort, who never came without bringing some dainty, in the shape of fish or frog. These were always graciously accepted and swallowed whole. It was only after his departure that the bones and other superfluous portions of his offering were disgorged.

To a casual observer these might appear to litter up the house somewhat; to the occupant they were necessary articles of furniture, on which the little ones would exercise their baby claws when they were old enough to go in for gymnastics.

In due course of time the infant bills poked their

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way through the weakened shells, and the nest was made lively by six squirming infants—featherless, shapeless, and blind.

From the moment they came into the world they made constant demands upon the time and attention of both parents, who were made most uncomfortable by having to listen to almost ceaseless cries indicative of hunger and loneliness. To satisfy both of these wants was impossible. Loneliness their elders knew to be endurable, so they wisely decided to throw all their energies into the commissary department.

While the youngsters were in their early infancy the smaller forms of animal life to be found in the pond furnished a very satisfactory menu. These had to be pushed far down into the elastic throats of the infants. With luscious water-beetles, tadpoles, leeches and countless minnows, the awkward little bodies were stuffed into shape. Provisions of a coarser nature the older birds ground up among the bones in their own crops before dispensing.

At this stage in their lives, at a glance one would hardly be able to tell whether these stuffy, squirming creatures were birds or reptiles. As they grew, their eyes opened and numerous dark points began to push themselves out all over the bodies. Their wardrobe for the season, the soft beautiful feathers to be, was done up in these hard coverings, which would open soon at the outer end and gradually be cast off in the form of scaly dust.

When the little ones were not being fed, or sleeping, they were scrambling about, over and among each other, hardening their muscles and growing as fast as they could. It was their only means of varying the monotony. With absolutely nothing to see it was necessary for them to find

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some other form of amusement, so they scrambled over and pinched and teased and snapped at each other like young kittens.

By and by the most venturesome ones began to make short excursions into the passageway which led to the outside world, but, on hearing a parent approaching, always scuttled quickly back, that the family group might be complete at the reception—a reception at which refreshments were to be served.

A rattling sound announced the coming of the visitors, and this sound they were now learning to imitate. Soon it came to pass that the proud parents were almost invariably greeted and dismissed by the muffled rattling of the infants.

In common with all birds living in holes, they learned to hiss, too, and often responded by hissing angrily when snapped at by one of their number, as they tumbled about with many an awkward gesture.

One luckless day, never to be forgotten by the mother, a strange sound from the outside world reached them—a sound which made their baby feathers stand on end with fright, a sensation hitherto unknown to them. They did not know what it was, but instinct told them it was something dreadful. Their mother would have understood, but she was away, far up the river on a marketing expedition. The father, too, had gone foraging, *down* the river. In fear and trembling they huddled together and anxiously awaited the return of their protectors.

After a time the mother came with the customary supplies. The comfort of her presence, even though momentary, was sufficient to banish all fear. By the time dinner was dispatched they had forgotten all about the experience.

The father they never saw again. On leaving home he

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had flown to his usual post of watchfulness, and, perching on the accustomed limb, had begun his solitary vigil with no thought of danger to himself. Motionless he sat, with a calm born of faith in his own powers. Though the time of waiting might have seemed long to others, he was not discouraged. Believing fully that all things come to him who waits, and, at the same time, attends to business, he kept his eye on the water till finally his faith was rewarded by the sight of a large fish coming down the stream—larger than any he had seen for days—and close behind it a smaller one. Prompt in decision, and impelled by hunger, he quickly made up his mind that the larger fish should be his own dinner, while the smaller one, more suited to their size, should be taken to the babies at home, if he could manage to catch both.

A shiver of expectancy ruffled his crest, a nervous jerk of his tail betrayed his eagerness as he waited a moment for the coveted prey to come under his watch tower. Then, with open bill and head down, he dropped like a shot into the water. Though he had captured the prize his grasp was not secure. The captive almost escaped, for, in his excitement, his bill had barely closed on the tail. Emerging from the water, he deftly tossed his catch into the air and caught it again, as it fell head-first into his open bill, which, closing, crushed out life. The great distensible throat caught the mangled form in its grasp and drew it out of sight. No escape for any victim after reaching that, with its lining of downward-pointing papillæ.

After waiting a moment for the fish to become settled, he started in pursuit of the smaller one he had seen. With a rattle of satisfaction he flew down the stream, casting his keen eye into every nook and corner. No lack of grace about the

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kingfisher now as his strong wings carried him along close to the water, sometimes almost touching it. With eager eye he searched both pools and shallows, but his prey had escaped.

Then back he went to his old perch. It was the best place after all, for, like many another fisherman, he found watching and waiting infinitely more profitable than a more active quest.

Shortly after, a boy in his wanderings chanced upon this spot, seldom disturbed by human visitations. With his gun he had come that way in search of some living target on which to improve his marksmanship, and seeing the lone watcher, aimed at him. A shot and a flash, and the kingfisher had gone to his reward. No real sportsman would have been guilty of shooting a bird useless to him or any one else, but the inexperienced boy thought not of this. Anything he could bring down was an object of pride. To satisfy this the solitary fisherman lost his life, a bird home was made desolate, and a young family learned to know the pangs of hunger.

The kingfisher's mate never knew what fate had befallen him—some misfortune, surely. One so devoted as he had always proved himself could never have deserted her in the time of greatest need. Their domestic life had been an ideal one. She remembered with pride his unremitting watchfulness during those dark days in the burrow. The great heap of bones on the floor of it testified to both his industry and his unselfishness. Long days she watched hopefully for his return, but, gradually, hope died out and she knew that hereafter she must live her life without the comfort of companionship. The tragedy which founded the family was being repeated. The fate of her most remote ancestress was hers.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

Though the joy had gone out of her life and her heart was heavy, the kingfisher mother had little time for mourning. Their family, six hungry, helpless, unreasoning little ones, must be provided for. Heretofore the replenishing of the larder had taxed the strength of both parents; now the survivor must bear the burden alone.

Fortunately the children were almost old enough to go out into the world, where they would learn to take care of themselves.

Though there were occasional hungry days in the hole in the bank, the brave mother did her best, and, by always being careful about dividing the food evenly, the little ones were kept reasonably plump, as they grew from kingfisher babyhood to youth. They did not sleep as much as of yore, but continued rolling about, teasing and snapping playfully at each other, more every day, thus, unconsciously, making themselves strong enough to succeed in the new outdoor life which was soon to be theirs. As they scrambled about in their play, every day their little claws grew stronger through claspings and unclasping the scattered bones.

Now they were becoming venturesome enough to go far out into the passageway to meet their mother as she returned from her marketing, and were able to give her a rattling greeting almost as grown-up in its sound as her own.

On coming to meet her, it never occurred to them to turn around and follow their bills when she drove them back into the oven-shaped dining-room before serving the customary refreshments. They seemed to think that in going back to any place it was necessary to move backward, and this they always did. And so it was that from constant practice they learned to travel backward even faster than they did forward. The motive was stronger. Their forward move-



Photograph by James H. Miller

YOUNG KINGFISHERS

“Their first view of the beautiful outside world.”

THE LONE FISHER

ments were prompted by idle curiosity, while hunger and warmth called them the other way.

After their first view of the great outside world, where all good things to eat came from—a world so airy and green and beautiful—their dreams of a life there were many. More and more often they came to the opening of the passageway to feast their eyes on the beauty before them, and to breathe the cool, fresh air. Nothing but fear held them in the old home now.

The tired mother, worn and thin from work and responsibility, felt sure that they were now old enough to lighten her labors by taking care of themselves, so she decided to conquer their foolish fears. She did not feed them so often now, but allowed them to grow hungry enough to brave almost any danger to satisfy the craving within them. Hunger is a wonderful inspiration sometimes.

With fear warning him back and hunger beckoning him on, the bravest took the first flight. His very indecision decided the matter for him as he stood on the threshold, a little farther out than he had ever been before; trying to make up his little mind which way to go, he lost his balance, and it was done. Without conscious effort the baby wings went up and down, little more than enough to break the fall, and before he knew it he was on the opposite side of the road.

Bewildered he looked about. The beautiful green grass was all around him, and the cool, soft, moist ground under him—so different from the hard, dry earth to which he was accustomed. And how different the odors were, too! Nothing fishy about the smell of this place, but, instead, the sweet odor of purple flags, and growing grasses, and fresh green willows.

Of course, he did not realize all this at first, but it came

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to him gradually as he sat on his shanks and threw out his breast in pride at his accomplishment. Such long, deep breaths he took as he had never taken before.

How brave and strong he felt!

Soon he was followed by his baby sister, who came and saw him do it all. His bravery had given her confidence. His going had looked so simple that she followed with hardly any fear. Indeed, she alighted with a faint rattle of bravery. With brief intervals between, one by one, they were joined by the others.

Returning after an unusually long absence, there the mother found them scattered about among the tall grasses. How proud she was to see them out here in the light! Quite like herself they looked in their coats of bright blue, and collars and belts of chestnut. The resemblance was certainly striking.

It was really the first time she had ever seen them in the light. Of course she had caught occasional glimpses of them backing into the tunnel to make room for her homecoming, but as for seeing all of any one of them, she had never had the pleasure. As she moved about among them, rattling her approval, such pride as she felt in them only a mother could understand. They were but four weeks old—possibly a few days older—yet they looked almost like grown-up birds—from the front, at least—but when they turned around their brevity of tail betrayed their youth.

After a few days they were moving around quite comfortably among the flags and grasses, as comfortably as though they had always lived there. They went forward mostly now, for backing around among grasses and things wasn't altogether pleasant. Besides, now that they had the advantages of light, they were beginning to like to see where



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

YOUNG KINGFISHER FAMILY

“It was really the first time she had ever seen them in the light.”

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they were going. In the hole it had been different; there was nothing to interfere with their feathers there—the few they had; there was only one place to go, and it was dark, anyway.

They learned to pick up food in most unexpected places—in the water, on the ground, among the willows. Baby toads, out walking for the first time, were among the choicest morsels which they found in these early days on the ground. These, together with great, juicy water-beetles, tender frogs, and an occasional fish which their mother brought them, kept them plump and cheerful.

However, life was not all enjoyment. There were dangers which made them look back with longing on the comfort and seclusion of their pin-feather youth. Hawks circled over them; owls swept by on soft wings at night; while water-rats were always near; snakes and weasels moved about among the grasses; and all were looking for just such dainties as baby birds.

Their wise mother warned them in kingfisher language to beware, but, inexperienced as they were, they could not always be on the lookout for enemies when food was to be hunted. One thing at a time was as much as they could attend to.

Often they mounted dead branches to look abroad on the world and see where the best foraging grounds were. A most engaging family with many winning ways! The restlessness of childhood was giving place to the quiet dignity of grown-up kingfisherhood. Though broad smiles sometimes gave evidence of their enjoyment, they never laughed aloud, as the flicker's noisy children often did; and when things went wrong they manifested their displeasure, by only a ruffle of the crest or an impatient flip of the tail—

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never by screaming and jumping up and down after the manner of the woodpecker's noisy progeny.

As time went by the family group grew noticeably smaller. One by one they disappeared, who may guess where?—none but their enemies could give the answer—till only two of them remained—the strongest and the wariest of them all. Their mother rarely saw them. Possibly she did not know that any were gone, as they had not been together for some time—at least she showed no sign.

The remaining ones scuttled and flew about among the reeds and willows. Often they wet their feet in the cool water or tumbled into its shady depths as they tried to get some of the living things which they saw there. They were awkward at first, but by and by they became more and more accurate in their calculations. Instinct was their teacher mainly, though they learned some few things by observation.

After watching their mother drop into the water and come up with a fish, they tried, and after a few trials were able to succeed in like endeavor. At first, refraction bothered them--the fish was never just where it seemed to be—but they soon learned to make allowances. Even then there were times when they were sure of making a catch, and, just as they were about to do so, the fish turned over and flashed his silvery side on them as a boy flashes a mirror. Then they always missed. There were many things to learn, but with experience for their teacher, and ready memories, they soon learned them.

Summer waned and the nights grew cold. All the other birds about the pond had departed. Through a fatality which a hawk had occasioned there was only one young kingfisher now. The nights grew colder. Both mother and child had to fluff out their feathers considerably and perch



Photograph by James H. Miller

KINGFISHER'S YOUTH

"Broad smiles sometimes gave evidence of their enjoyment."

THE LONE FISHER

closer to the tree trunks in order to keep warm when the chill winds blew. One morning when they went to look for a breakfast they found that Mother Nature, at the bidding of the frost king, had locked their storehouse for the winter. Nothing was left for them to do but to fly away in search of food elsewhere.

Remembering her experience of yesteryear, the sensible mother decided to follow the stream which had provided for them so bountifully in the days of their prosperity. After one last long look at the scene of their joys and sorrows, a scene which would linger long in their memories, down the river they went, the mother leading and the young one, now as large and almost as strong as herself, following. Stopping only occasionally for needed rest and the scant refreshment to be found at that season on the ground—on down they flew, past the place where the stream joined a larger one, and that a still larger one, and across broad waters, till they reached a spot which reminded them somewhat of the old home in its palmiest days. Though like the old home in a way, it was different; there was a bank—more cozy than the home bank—and water—but the plants were not at all like those they had known.

They knew it was best for them to stay here for a time, so they made the best of things, but they could not feel any attachment for the place. Their hearts were in the North, where life is not a mere matter of eating and drinking—the place where homes are made. All winter they longed for it, till, at last, when spring was coming on, they could endure the homesickness no longer.

Over the water they went, and on up the river and on. It was a long and weary journey, but not half so long as it had seemed in the autumn, for home was at the end of it.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

On the way they fell in with others of their kind, journeying in the same direction and drawn by the same yearnings. These new acquaintances, though, were but for a day or two, for each returned to the home of his childhood, there to repeat the experiences of the kingfishers of other years.

In our drives during the coming season, if we should catch a glimpse of one of these earnest, silent watchers perched on a branch overhanging the water, how many of us will betray our belief in the doctrine of metempsychosis by seeing in the lone creature not a mere bird, but, instead, the faithful spirit of the once beautiful Halcyone, reincarnated—earnestly gazing out across the water in the vain hope that it may some day bring back to her her lost love, and that companionship which the lone spirit ever craves?

Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long, back on itself recoils.

MILTON—*Paradise Lost*.

THE ORIGIN OF THE HAWK

THE powerful Thracian, King Tereus, that his influence might be extended, wedded the daughter of Pandion, King of Athens. The gods, displeased with this union, refused to attend the nuptials; neither Juno, the guardian of marriage rites, nor Hymenæus, nor the Graces were present, but the Furies, brandishing torches snatched from a funeral pile, attended and accompanied the pair to the abode of Tereus. As the party journeyed thither, croaking ravens flew to the left of them, and on their arrival the ill-boding owl hovered over the bridal chamber. With these omens were Tereus and the daughter of Pandion wedded.

After Titan had drawn the seasons of the repeated year through five successive autumns, the queen, with the home-longing still in her heart, and with love for her own made stronger by long absence, entreated her spouse to either allow her to return to her father's home for a season or to go thither himself and bring back her only sister for a visit. In answer to her beseechings, ships were launched and Tereus set out on his journey to urge the request of his queen.

At first Pandion hesitated about parting with his remaining daughter, the comfort of his age, for even so short a time as asked; but finally, yielding to the eloquence of Tereus, he tearfully commended her to his care on the promise of her speedy return.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

When the waves urged by the oars had borne them away from the shore and a father's care, the faithless Tereus, forgetful of his queen at home, made love to the beautiful sister. Having been repulsed by the maiden, he, on landing, shut her up in a tower and cut out her tongue to prevent her making known his perfidy. On meeting his queen he, with feigned sorrow, reported her sister as among the dead and mourned with her over the loss.

But the imprisoned one, though through the loss of her tongue deprived of speech, found other means of communicating with the deceived queen. She skilfully wove her story in purple and white into a web of barbarian design, and by signs persuaded an attendant to deliver it to her sister, who immediately understood.

The queen, having delivered her injured sister from captivity, had her brought to the court of Tereus, where together the two, made cruel by their wrongs, planned their revenge.

Itys, the young son of Tereus, whose birth had been attended by many boding signs, was slain by the two and served on the table of his father; the attendants were removed, according to the rites of that country, and the king feasted alone, thus becoming the sepulchre of his son.

When the horrible repast was completed, Tereus, on calling for Itys, was given by the queen the whole story in language such as he deserved.

Frantic with grief and anger, with drawn sword he pursued the daughters of Pandion, who, in their flight, by their wishes were given wings, as was also the pursuer.

Philomela fled to the woods to hide among the leaves of the trees, where, in the voice of the nightingale, she may ever be heard in mournful melody lamenting the death of



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill •

THE ANGRY TEREUS AS HE LOOKS TODAY
(RED-TAILED HAWK)

THE ORIGIN OF THE HAWK

Itys and her family's dishonor. Progne sought refuge under the eaves of houses, whence she ever darts forth at twilight to seek among others of her kind the reincarnated spirit of the slain Itys; and though she vainly tries to tell her story in song, her mutilated tongue yields only brief twitterings, while on her breast she still bears the red stain of her crime. Tereus, as a hawk, with armed face and close-clutching grasp, is ever either pursuing or hovering in the air, awaiting an opportunity for revenge upon the smaller birds, who to him are the fleeing daughters of Pandion.

HAWK LIFE

ON acquaintance with that rapacious bird of regal elegance, the red-shouldered hawk, one of the most common as well as most representative of his kind, or with his brother, the red-tailed, equally elegant and even more widely distributed, the story of the transformation of *Tereus* is easily credited. On some daring squirrel whisking through the trees, or some heedless song-bird stirring the leaves as he alights for a moment upon a branch above the bough where the hawk sits cruelly alert, what anger and hatred he shows!

His enmity, which in the long-ago was directed only toward the fleeting, flitting, light-winged swallow, who, in her fear, dared not pause in her flight even when tortured by hunger, and the timorous nightingale hiding in the sheltering wood, strengthened by long continuance, now embraces all living creatures too small or weak to resist him. The fierce, demoniacal cries which he occasionally allows to escape him as he swings across the fruitful meadow marshes in quest of prey might well come from one bereft and crazed, by grief, on vengeance bent.

There are a number of hawks common to America, some of local and others of general distribution, the largest, the osprey, or fish hawk, having the proud distinction of being purveyor to the eagle. The next in size, and the most beau-



Photograph by Edward Warren

NEST OF THE RED-TAILED HAWK

HAWK LIFE

tiful, are the red-tailed and the red-shouldered—commonly known as hen hawks, though it has been proven that the number of young chickens they destroy is unworthy of notice when compared with the vast number of mice and other small animals which they retire from circulation. To every chicken captured as many as a hundred of the latter are taken. The real menaces to the poultry yard are the sharp-shinned Coopers and the marsh hawk, all of these being able to dart down, secure their booty, and be off before they are noticed.

The rough-legged, or black hawk, is the most nocturnal of the family, choosing the late evening, when small animals are abroad, as his season of greatest activity. The sparrow hawk, the smallest and, next to the rough-legged, the most graceful member of the family, is the most proficient mouser and an active enemy of the brown grasshopper known as the "tobacco spitter." One bird alone will destroy two hundred or more of these in a single day.

Some varieties are watch-tower hunters who perch on stumps, leafless trees, or haystacks, or hang suspended in the air waiting for their victims to pass under them. Others are brush and grass beaters, while some employ both methods, but all are more or less cannibalistic, and all are valuable as destroyers of harmful animal and insect life.

With keen eyes exploring the grasses and low, herbaceous growths for the tiny, helpless creatures either crouching there in fear or peacefully nibbling the succulent roots, back and forth beats the hawk with alternate wing-tips brushing the tops of the vegetation to flush his prey, sending the little refugees scurrying in every direction, or causing them to crouch close to the ground: frightened meadow-mice hide in their covered runways or seek shelter in their domed dwellings; wriggling snakes sinuously betake themselves to their

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

holes; and warty toads close their bright eyes and trust their earthy color to protect them.

Often the vigilant hunter snatches up his victim with no pause in his flight, then sweeps on to some perch where he can enjoy his sanguinary feast at leisure.

Even his ominous shadow passing over them as this ravenous bird of Jupiter swims above in the heavens, is enough to strike terror to the creatures who know him as an enemy—for any moment he is likely to drop down upon them as though shot from the sky. On descending thus to earth he clasps his hapless victim in his crooked and almost invariably fatal talons. Even though his clutch should accidentally prove insecure, his wings and tail enclose his quarry in a prison from which there is no avenue of escape save that beneath his armed beak.

Yet this bird, hated by the unthinking partly because of his rapacity, but more because of reputed visits to the poultry yard, is not without his merits. The same wings that in the meadows surround and imprison his prey, are used in his home life to form a vaulted cover to protect from the heat of the sun and also from storms and rain, his helpless young, for whom he cares most tenderly. However cruel he may be to his enemies, to his own he is gentle as any bird in the wood. Proudly he assists his constant mate in pluming her beautiful feathers and lovingly he strokes both her and the little ones with the beak that is looked upon as cruel by those who have with him only a belligerent acquaintance.

His unmusical, muttering monologue when alone and his fierce cry when pouncing upon his quarry both suggest the transformed *Tereus*; but his soft, muffled utterances when attending to the wants of his offspring hark back to the time



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

THE HAWK SPREADING OVER PREY

"The wings and tail enlose his quarry in a prison from which there is no avenue of escape except beneath his armed beak."

HAWK LIFE

of the loving father before the disruption of the Thracian home.

Seldom attacking any creature capable of resistance, the hawk, though of brave appearance, is really a coward. The warrior crow, though much smaller than he, through sheer bravery is able to put him to rout, and occasionally a group of smaller birds, emboldened by numbers, mob him; yet the peaceable hen, many times the size of either, is boldly approached and carried off by this wary bird.

On his list of those who may be attacked safely are the various kinds of squirrels, rabbits, crawfish, reptiles, lizards, frogs, toads, musk-rats, common rats, mice, skunks, opossums, grasshoppers and crickets. The indigestible portions of these are ejected from the throat in the form of compact pellets similar to "owl balls."

Driven to the harsh necessity of securing the meat diet on which alone he can subsist, he is doomed to a life of perpetual quest and conquest of those creatures whose chief business in life is to elude him. Notice how his calling has sharpened his vision and shaped his beak and claws, the tools of his guild. Even the baby hawks still in the nest have these characteristic features most strongly marked.

With a wing expanse of four or five feet and the power of inflating his body with air at pleasure, the hawk is sublimely picturesque in his cloud-piercing evolutions of flight, as in ever-narrowing spirals he mounts to the cooler regions of the air when the heat below proves disagreeable. With scarcely a motion of his great wings he circles and careens about at a height of hundreds of feet, at times even seeming to remain for a season suspended in the sky in a perfectly stationary attitude.

While these birds are attached to their home locality,

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

they are known to take long flights. Nuttall relates an instance of one of this family, a Canary falcon, that was sent to the Duke of Lerma, and that returned in sixteen hours from Andalusia to the Island of Teneriffe, a distance of seven hundred and fifty miles. It is said that were it not for the power of inflation, not of the lungs alone, but of their whole bodies, the swiftness with which these, as well as some other birds, move through the air, would cause suffocation.

The esthetic value of the hawk lies wholly in his sublimity of flight and in his majesty of form and attractiveness of color, for no beautiful Dryad ever taught him to sing. Even his love notes are uttered in strident, raucous tones, harsh as the jay's muster call, but happily they are understood by his sympathetic mate, who knows the heart of her lord, who has improved on the ways of the founder of the family. With them as with other rapacious birds, the conjugal bond is perpetual.

As we come to know these picturesque birds better we learn that they, in common with all other living creatures, have both their faults and their merits. Though through their fondness for flesh many a downy chick fails to reach maturity, many a tuneful warbler is called to his reward, and the billowy trail of song following many a goldfinch becomes only a memory echo, were it not for their assistance our farms would soon be overrun by pests impossible to hold in check by artificial means. When even the worst of hawks are weighed in the balance the greatest weight will be found, invariably, upon the side of beneficent service.



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

YOUNG RED-SHOULDERED HAWKS

“His calling has sharpened his vision, and shaped his beak and claws, the tools of his guild. Even the baby hawks have these characteristic features most strongly marked.”

In such a strait the wisest may well be perplexed.

BURKE.

HOW THE BUZZARD OR VULTURE WAS CLOTHED

(IROQUOIS LEGEND)

IN the beginning, birds were created without covering. Ashamed of their long legs and ill-shaped bodies, they hid themselves among trees and rocks. They were also without song, as their throats had not yet been fitted for producing music. Long afterward, when this power had come to them, they learned their songs from whispering leaves, falling rain, running brooks and whistling winds.

But being endowed with speech, they continually complained of their fate, and with one accord shouted and cried aloud to the Great Spirit, asking for coverings. Soon the message came to them that their garments were ready, at a certain place a long way off, but that each bird must attend to the fitting of his own.

A messenger must be sent, as a vote was immediately taken. Because of his great strength and superior powers of endurance, the choice of the assemblage was the turkey buzzard. Proud of the trust reposed in him he started on his mission.

But as the journey was long and no provision had been made for food, he was tortured by hunger till, able to endure its pangs no longer, he was driven to eat carrion to sustain life.

On arriving at the appointed place he found the garments ready, and, as a reward, he was allowed first choice.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

Without hesitation, he selected the most beautiful among them, but discovered upon trying it on that, in its long feathers, flying would be difficult, so it was laid aside. From one to another he went, but there was some fault to be found with each. One was not warm enough, another would attract too much attention, another would soil too easily. So he went through the entire collection till he came to the last—the coarsest, ugliest, plainest among them—and too small to be drawn up over the face, as all the others could be worn. But as he had been forbidden to try on any garment more than once, he must either take the one he has worn ever since that day, or go uncovered.

When birds congregate to-day, they often twit the buzzard with reference to his unattractive dress, and taunt him with his uncleanly habits; but he invariably reminds them that he had the first choice and selected the one that pleased him best among all bird coverings, and that his habits were acquired through doing a service for others.



Photograph by Ernest Harold Baynes

TURKEY VULTURE

VULTURE LIFE

WITH necks drawn down and shoulders thrown high, and with limbs crouching in the constant but vain endeavor to make their abbreviated, shingled coats cover the roughened and reddened flesh of their naked heads and at the same time hide from view their unshapely bodies, generations of vultures have suffered from the inconvenience and embarrassment entailed on them by the indecision of their primal father. Brevity of raiment is noticeable in even the young vulture, though not so marked as in the case of their elders. In youth, grayish, furry feathers form a ruff and cap for the shrinking bird; but, for some reason, these disappear on its arrival at maturity, when the warty head shows ugly and bare.

The gloomy cloak of the adult is not only too short at the top, but at the bottom also, where it allows the ungainly, wrinkled feet to protrude below it in such a way that their owner, as though ashamed and unwilling to expose them more than is needful by walking after the manner of other feathered creatures, must needs move from place to place, when on the ground, in awkward jumps—a form of locomotion more pronounced in the black than in the turkey vulture. With such a wardrobe and with such physical defects, is it at all surprising that this bird shuns the main thoroughfares and confines his urban wanderings to dumps and alleys? Is

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

it any wonder that he does not appear on the concert platform?

The vulture's lack of song cannot be attributed to size entirely, for other birds equally large are not without musical ability. With the coming dawn for inspiration, chanticleer wakes the world with his matin; strolling about in the sunshine, his portly spouse gives tuneful utterance to her enjoyment; on the approach of rain guineas and peafowls pour forth pæans of thanksgiving, while the funereal vulture is almost as silent as the dead on which he preys. Nothing seems to touch the song spring in his nature.

In vocal expression, there is evidence of decadence in the vulture family, for, although Indian tradition states plainly that its early members were able to express themselves freely in speech, they are now the most taciturn of birds, an occasional "wah," a low, hissing sound, and a grunt—seemingly inspired by overeating—are to-day all they have to give the world in the way of language.

The accidental meal with which the ambassador vulture refreshed himself on that ancient but memorable journey, seems to have determined the gustatory tastes of his clan for all succeeding ages. Since that time only decaying food has the power to charm their palates, though it is said that under stress of hunger these birds attack and kill defenseless small birds and animals by piercing their eyes. Putrid animal matter, the choicest item on the vulture menu, is earnestly sought and eagerly devoured by them. This is generally supposed to be due to lack of strength in claws incapable of tearing flesh that has not been weakened by decay.

In finding their food, vultures are not dependent upon the sense of smell, as is commonly believed. Like all other



Photograph by Ernest Harold Baynes

YOUNG TURKEY VULTURE

"In youth grayish, furry feathers form
a ruff and cap for the shrinking bird."

VULTURE LIFE

birds, devoid of outer nostrils, they are guided entirely by sight. The experiment has been tried of placing a dead animal under a table, where the breezes could circulate freely about it and bear the odor of putridity to those likely to appreciate it most, with the result that none came to the feast, though it was perfectly accessible, while the mere pictured carcass of another drew a throng of would-be banqueters.

In southern cities these dark scavengers, who form a self-constituted sanitary commission, are regularly depended upon to consume refuse about butcher shops and to rid garbage heaps of such matter as is suited to vulture tastes. After their visitations, nothing of animal origin remains that is sufficiently decayed to render digestion unnecessary.

In the rural districts of that region, as well as throughout the Mississippi Valley, they render equally valuable service in disposing of perished animals on the farms and plains. On the taking off of one of these, a group of the uncanny birds is certain to attend the wake. The lifeless body is covered with a living pall as the ghoulish guests partake of the funeral feast. Tearing away the outer flesh, they feed on the vitals of the dead as did the mythic vulture on the vitals of the living Prometheus. With crowding and pushing in the efforts of the feathered appetites to procure more favorable locations, the gluttonous revel continues till satiety brings it to a close, when the feasters, if not too full for locomotion, betake themselves to neighboring trees, where they remain till hours of slothfulness return to them strength for another attack.

The home of the black vulture is in the South, while the turkey vulture is distributed over the whole of the inland portion of America, including the mountainous section. The California condor, the largest of the vultures, is the most

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

shy, and the black the least so, of the family, the latter paying little more attention to man than common domestic fowls do.

The black vultures of the South betray their dislike of cold in their habits of gathering on cool days around chimneys for warmth, and in lying about on the sunny sides of roofs and spreading their wings to receive every ray of sunshine available; and when thunderstorms arise they betake themselves to regions beyond the clouds, where they comfortably ride the air above the storm.

Mr. Beebe tells of seeing in Mexico flocks of thousands of these birds rising in a revolving, cone-shaped mass till, on reaching a great height, where they seemed no larger than flies, they disbanded and disappeared among the clouds.

The turkey vulture, the most graceful in flight, possesses a remarkable stretch of wing as well as wonderful buoyancy. One writer tells of watching the aerial manoeuvres of one of this species, and on timing it he discovered that in twenty minutes but a single stroke of the wings was given.

Though when on the ground the habits of these efficient members of the public service preclude admiration, though there they have little picturesque value and are tolerated only on account of their economic worth—when their broad wings bear them aloft into the heavens, their flight expresses the utmost grace. On seeing them swinging upward in diminishing spirals, and majestically sweeping the sky on almost motionless wings, all their former awkwardness, all their imperfections, are forgotten.

The robin and the redbreast,
The robin and the wren,
If ye take out of the nest
Ye'll never thrive again.
The robin and the redbreast,
The martin and the swallow,
If ye touch one of their eggs
Bad luck will sure to follow.

—*Essex Rhyme.*

GENESIS OF THE ROBIN

AMONG the Chippewas, as among some other tribes of Indians, when a son became old enough to leave boyhood behind and to take his place among the braves of his people, it was necessary for him to pass through a season of fasting—twelve long days and nights—during which the great Manitou would come to him and free him from his childhood's nature and in its stead give to him the strength and endurance of a braver manhood. One unable to endure this test to the end would be forever despised of his tribe, and would not be allowed to join with the braves in the hunt, or to go with them into battle.

Because of his gentle nature, when his time of trial arrived, the son of a great chief did not wish to follow his father into the deep forest to the trial lodge, which was to be the scene of his fasting. Though he was brave, he did not wish to be as the warriors who went forth to kill. He longed only to make others happy.

But the chief commanded and the son dared not refuse. During the long walk he was sad at heart, though the father sought to cheer him by telling him how the tribe would honor him when he appeared at the great feast to be served when he had proved himself strong to endure. Thus the father talked, every now and then stopping to mark the trees in the picture language of the Indian, that the way to their wigwam might not be lost.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

On arriving, he spread for the youth the mat of reeds the Indian mother had proudly woven for him, her first-born, and who now laid himself face downward upon it, beside the great bow and arrows and tomahawk of his father.

With a heavy heart he heard the sound of the father's footsteps growing fainter and fainter as he departed; then he was alone with the silence.

All through the long day and the long night he lay there alone. Morning, bringing light and gladness to others, brought no joy to the sad youth in the forest.

When the father came to ask if any dreams had come to him, the boy replied: "O my father, such dreams as you wish will never come to me. Let me give up this cruel fasting and return with you to our wigwam." But the father, whose Indian pride prevented his yielding to the beseechings of his child, would talk only of the glad time when the fast would be ended, and told of the days of his own fasting with their glorious ending.

Each day with cheering words the chief returned, only to find the youth growing weaker. On the tenth morning he did not rise to greet the father as he had done before. His weakened limbs would no longer support him.

"Spare me, O my father, and take me home," he whispered; "no dreams will come. I am so weak that surely death will take me before the great Manitou comes. Give me food that I may break this dreadful fast."

But the unyielding chief replied: "If you wait with brave and patient heart, my son, soon you shall be a great hunter, never knowing lack of food; you shall be a great warrior, wise as the fox and strong as the bear; and many scalps you shall wear at your belt. Better that you should



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

ROBIN FEEDING YOUNG

"Their days were spent in diligently providing for
the family whose days were a continual repast."

GENESIS OF THE ROBIN

die of hunger than that boy and squaw should cry: 'Shame upon your father's son!' Be brave!"

On the eleventh day the youth had grown so faint with fasting that his voice could no longer be heard. Still the father said: "Be brave!" And again the dying footsteps and the silence and the hunger!

While yet the dew glistened on the hemlock boughs, on the following morning the chief hastened to the trial lodge, bearing thick-boiled sap and meat of moose to revive the famished youth. But to his "Rise and eat, my son. Come, the great feast is spread," no answer came. Only an echo was heard.

As he stopped to listen, a bird, such as he had never seen, on a bough nearby, called to him. Thinking some evil spirit had lured the boy away and had returned in bird form to mock at him, the father raised his bow to shoot.

"Do not shoot," sang the bird, as if with human tongue. "No evil spirit has harmed me; a good spirit came to me and bade me live. The pathway of the spirits I shall never walk, but will ever live on the earth as you see me now. Though I shall never be a strong warrior, I am still your son and shall always be brave. My food I shall find among the hills and valleys, and in taking it, I shall help your people. Mourn not for me, my father, for my happiness will come through helping others, not through destroying them. And the song I sing from the trees will be what my heart is ever calling: 'Be more gentle; be more loving.'"

In the moon of melting snows, when the buds swell red on the maples, the opeechee calls in joyful tones to us to-day as he did to the Indian of old.

In the early morning, before the first faint streaks of dawn appear, out of the graying darkness his glad voice calls

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

to all his people to arise and see the coming of each beautiful new day, and when as the hours go by, they grow tired and faint with hunger, he still calls to them from among the branches, and bids them, "Be brave"—a message always followed by a sweeter one, "Be more gentle; be more loving."

ROBIN LIFE

SCARCELY has earth's great white death-sheet been transformed into living waters that hasten to free the ice-bound streams, when the robin is heard in brief tones calling to-day as he did to his kindred of old—calling to all living things to be brave and come forth from their hiding places; assuring all feathered creatures that a feast is soon to follow. And when we hear the call we know that a rapidly approaching springtime is pushing winter into the northland.

The little messenger with ruddy breast does not deliver his tidings from some lofty far-away station, but coming near to earth, and perching on a lowly bough, in a voice of soulful sympathy he repeats the words of the ancient chieftain: "Be brave!" And, while they come to us like an echo out of the past, they are uttered partly, no doubt, for self-encouragement.

On his arrival, though his voice expresses bravery and cheer, there is not the glad joy in it that we hear later when his mate arrives. Before that the days have not yet cast off the winter's chill, and there is really very little to sing about. Yet the first note of the robin is deemed by all the most certain of vernal promises—that and the bluebird's early warble. This song of his, dispelling the winter's silence and drawing his hearers into the great current of anticipation, makes the winter naught but a lingering memory.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

Later in the season, when all the earth is teeming with life and the vernal chorus is at the full, in the early morning hours the robin's awakening voice heralds the coming of each new day as he calls out that earth's great dark slumber-robe is being taken away, and the time is come to rouse from the inactivity of the night. The faintest purpling of the east is the signal for the hair-bird's thin, incisive prelude to the avian hymn of the morn. Then the robin takes up the message in a voice that carries, and soon all the morning air is athrob with the voices of innumerable singers in an anthem that, breaking our slumbers, hallows the dawn. If there be such, distance obliterates all discord and all imperfection. With such inspiration, is it any wonder that man in the long ago learned to express himself in musical tones?

In this matin hymn of the woodland choir the robin's voice leads all the rest. Even when the great flood of song has reached full swell his tones can still be clearly distinguished, and when, with the growing light, he withdraws from the chorus, the song dies out with the darkness, like a lullaby that is ended.

Then for a season all the feathered creatures of the wood give themselves up to the pleasures of the feast spread before them. It is now that the countless forms of creeping insect life are abroad, drawn from their diurnal retreats under leaves and grasses by the alluring damps of the night. The hymn just heard from these feathered songsters, while it seemed to us but the outpouring of devotional spirit, was to those of their kind also an invitation to the feast, or, if you will, a tuneful grace before meals.

To some, more beautiful than this is the robin's even-song, sung after the catbird and the red thrush, from their haunts in grape-vine tangles, have called their farewell to

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departing day. In late spring at eventide, when the very atmosphere is permeated and aglow with vernal color, filling the grove with a green glory, when the lingering echo of the liquid tones of the wood thrush is still in our hearts, and the faint twitter of retiring birds fills the place with audible as well as scenic beauty, the robin, chanting his persuasive lay, "Be more gentle; be more loving," seems not to be preaching to us so much as to be voicing the spirit of the grove. As the tuneful hour of dawn is hallowed by his matin hymn, the hour of twilight is made sacred by his vesper.

When robin arrived from the southland, he hopped about for a time, seemingly with no special object in view, now that he had sung out his tidings of a nearby future, balmy and warm; but when his little mate arrived, there was work to be done as well as songs to be sung. For a few days they hopped about together over the rapidly greening ground, stopping every now and then to listen for the almost imperceptible sound of wriggling living creatures just under its surface, then, quickly burying their bills in the sod, they braced themselves for a tug, and brought forth a reluctant worm.

Soon they began to look about for a location for a summer adobe. Various trees in both orchard and grove were visited, but it was finally decided to reconstruct the tumble-down home of the previous year, on the outreaching bough of a young oak. Indeed, it had been their home for two years now! Then both set to work to make it habitable.

First it was cleared of the dead leaves that had blown into it, and of other loose rubbish, then a few good new sticks and weed-stems were added, and a quantity of soft mud brought and molded into a neat cup by the shaping breast

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of the little dame, though her mate assisted in providing material and helping to place the soft grass lining. How little she seemed to care about her appearance! How worn and tired and bedraggled she looked while the work was going on! But this seeming carelessness was not to be a permanent defect in her character, for as soon as her house was plastered, she took a refreshing bath in a wayside pool, carefully arranged her feathers, and was again the neat, trim little creature to whom robin had paid court in the days just gone.

This pool-bathing, by the way, is a time-honored custom among robins. Often a number of them are seen indulging together in this form of recreation, then scattering to hop about the lawn or grass spots in the open woodland, in quest of grubs and worms—and never seen to better advantage are these touches of living color, that add charm to any landscape. In the midst of winter, on hearing the robin mentioned, this, in all probability, would be the mental picture recalled by nine out of every ten persons.

On bright sunny days, with a heart brimming over with springtime, robin often perched on a swinging bough and allowed the joy of the season to gush from his throbbing throat. Even in the rain he sang! His world was so full of happiness that he must needs express it whether the sun shone or not. While his song is not so musical as that of many another bird, it charms us because it speaks of cheer—even in the midst of cheerlessness. This rain-song usually continued till the shower was over, when all the birds of the woods repeated the glad news, then hurried off to another feast; for the rainy hours were even more fruitful of worms than those of mere nocturnal dampness.

After the laying of the blue eggs came the weary days



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

ROBIN INSPECTING YOUNG

ROBIN LIFE

of incubation, bringing with them a recompense in the glad joy of anticipation of the new young lives soon to fill the nest. Robin shared in the labor of keeping the eggs warm, as he did later in that of providing food for the young family.

When the nest was full of young there was little time for him to devote to his music. His daylight hours, as well as his mate's, were spent in diligently providing for their family, whose days were a continuous repast. As they hopped about the lawn, looking and listening for worms, every withered blade of grass, every sound attenuated beyond mortal hearing, was significant of that life in the underworld which alone could satisfy the gustatory longings of the babes in the nest. On returning from a foraging expedition, our little robins always found their ravenous young with open bills ready to receive the fruit of their search. Two or three times his own weight in worms did each of these consume every day. No wonder the pin-feathers pushed out so rapidly all over the small bodies—and that these so soon burst into real feathers.

When not plying their brood with food, the older pair were attending to their other wants. Infant bills must be cleaned and all superfluous matter removed from the nest. Bits of egg-shell were carried away, and occasional blades of grass, that were accidentally gleaned with the harvest of worms, were removed, keeping the nest in a state of perfect neatness and cleanliness. During the hours when the sun shone directly on the nest, the little ones were shielded from its burning rays by maternal wings, while the father alone provided food. Both parents were absolutely self-forgetful in their devotion.

But new cares were awaiting them: the nestlings were already overflowing the mud cup on the outreaching bough.

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Now that they were strong enough and sufficiently equipped with feathers to enter life in the great outside world, they were beginning to show the fear that would be their greatest protection when they reached the ground and had to take care of themselves. The trustful innocence of their babyhood was gone, and the bravery of older robinhood had not yet come to take its place. But however much they might fear the dangers outside, the nest was no longer large enough to hold them.

Fortunately, it was the two larger ones who were first crowded over the edge to the ground below. It was not such a fearsome thing, after all—this being on the ground, for their ever-watchful father was there to take them in charge and to lead them to a place of greater safety, while the mother devoted her energies to the babes still in the nest. Soon the hour struck for them to depart from the adobe home, and they, too, sought the ground.

The days that followed were the most anxious and trying for the older members of the family. Not only did every mouthful of food have to be hunted and pursued in its efforts to escape, but the fledglings did also. This terrible fear that had lately come upon them prompted them to hide away in tall grasses or under leaves and bushes. The faintest sound caused them to seek shelter, where their elders found them crouching in fright.

After a few days the father took entire charge of them, while the mother prepared another nest of yesteryear, in an apple tree over the way, for a second brood. The little ones roosted on convenient boughs in the near neighborhood for a time, but after a while, when their wings were plumed for longer flights, they spent the night with their father and many others of his kind at a roost down near the river, while



Photograph by Edward Warren

YOUNG ROBBINS ROOSTING

"The little ones roosted on convenient
boughs in the near neighborhood for a time."

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their days were devoted to wandering about over the old pastures and profiting by parental instruction in the different methods of discovering where cutworms crawl. He showed them also where grew the wild fruits and berries which are more to the taste of robins still in speckled livery. Besides, they were beginning to give more or less successful imitations of the father's song as he sang of hope to his brooding mate, but not until the years have brought them experience will they sing with his fervor.

When the new brood come from the nest, the parent birds care for them jointly. The summer's song and care have left their voices weaker, but it has not affected their happiness. After a day devoted to nursery duties, as he sits on a higher limb than in the springtime, hear him calling to his faithful mate his message of love—and as he pauses, seemingly for her approval, at the end of his lay, her tender "sweet, sweet," called from a bough not far below, agrees fully with our own sentiments.

It is difficult to imagine how any one could fail to cherish these interesting tenants of our groves. They should be protected on utilitarian as well as æsthetic grounds. Some one has most fitly called them the "guardian angels of our soil." The cutworms and other harmful forms of life which they destroy, if left alone would do more damage than one could easily estimate; the little fruit they consume—never their staple food, but merely an occasional luxury—is nothing more than their rightful wage. Besides, cultivated fruits are left undisturbed when there are wild fruits conveniently near.

As the summer wanes, the older birds cease to look for food on the ground and betake themselves to haunts where autumn berries, wild ivy, grape and deer berries are found.

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As we notice them growing more and more shy and beginning to haunt the treetops, we may know that their days among us are numbered. The subtle suggestion of autumn's crimson and gold, the curling leaves and falling nuts, awaken the migratory instinct. Soon, when the groves are seared by frosts, with the gay vesture of the youthful year dulled by a season of labor, they will be scarcely distinguishable from the wind-swept leaves as they are caught in the great southern drift; yet, on the eve of their departure, in voices threadbare but earnest, they will preach in the golden gray of the autumn twilight the same doctrine of gentleness and love that they preached in the green glory of the springtime—and among all their hearers, who fully understand the code, none are found who fail to follow the cryptic call.

The many-wintered crow that leads
The clanging rookery home.

TENNYSON.

THE RAVEN OR CROW IN LITERATURE

THE raven and his congener, the crow, are so confused in literature, as well as in the minds of the great mass of people who are unfamiliar with ornithological classification, that it is almost a necessity to here treat them as identical. The raven is a larger bird and not quite so numerous or widely distributed as the crow, but in general appearance and habits they are practically the same.

If tradition is to be credited, we are more indebted to this bird of ancient family than to any other feathered creature, for he has played an important part in history—sacred and profane—in literature, and in art; and throughout all ages and nations he has rendered invaluable service.

On the authority of the Koran we know that it was he who first taught man to bury his dead. When Cain knew not what disposition to make of the body of his slain brother, "God sent a raven, who killed another raven in his presence, and then dug a pit with his beak and claws, and buried him therein." And it was the raven whom Noah sent forth to learn whether the waters had abated—one of the rare instances wherein he ever proved faithless to his trust—and it was he who gave sustenance to the hungry prophet, Elijah.

In Norse mythology, Odin, the greatest of all the gods—the raven's god—had for his chief advisers two ravens, Hugin and Munin (Mind and Memory), who were sent out

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by him each morning on news-gathering journeys, and who returned to him at nightfall to perch on his shoulders and whisper into his ears the intelligence of the day. When news of unusual importance was desired, Odin himself, in raven guise, went forth to seek it. And when the Norse armies went into battle they followed the raven standard—a banner under which William the Conqueror fought. “If the Danish arms were destined to defeat, the raven hung his head and dropped his wings; if victory was to attend them, he stood erect and soaring.”

Norse navigators, when setting sail, took with them a pair of ravens to be liberated and followed as guides. If these birds returned, it was known that land did not lie in the direction taken; but if they did not, they were followed. The discoveries of both Iceland and Greenland are attributed to their leadership.

To the Romans and Greeks, the raven was an embodied god and the chief bird of omen, whose effigy was borne on their banners, and whose auguries were followed with the greatest confidence; while to the German mind he was His Satanic Majesty made manifest in feathers.

Not only gods, but mortals also, are known to have assumed raven shape—if Don Quixote be an authority—for this doughty knight informs us that the great King Arthur passed into raven form, not through choice, but through witchcraft, and that as a raven he still lives and flies about over his erstwhile kingdom, waiting to be liberated; and that for this reason no Englishman would ever be guilty of taking the life of one of these birds, for fear of becoming a regicide.

In some parts of Germany these birds are believed to hold the souls of the damned, while in other European sections wicked priests only are believed to be so reincarnated.



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

THE MANY-WINTERED CROW

"Old Munin has selected a place where he may
ponder undisturbed over the occurrences of the day."

THE RAVEN OR CROW IN LITERATURE

In Sweden the ravens croaking at night in the swamps are said to be the ghosts of murdered persons who have been denied Christian burial, and whom, on this account, Charon has refused ferriage across the river Styx.

As a companion of saints this bird has had a wide experience; every day for sixty years he brought bread to St. Paul, the Hermit, in the desert, and on the day preceding the saint's death he brought a double share, that there might be sufficient to supply the needs of St. Anthony, who was visiting him. St. Benedict's raven saved his life by bearing away the poisoned loaf sent to this saint by a jealous priest. After his torture and death at Saragossa, when the body of St. Vincent was thrown to the wild beasts, it was rescued by ravens and borne to his brothers at Valencia, where it reposed in a tomb till the Christians of that place were expelled by the Moors. The remains of the saint were then carried away by the exiled Christians, who were driven ashore at a point since known as Cape St. Vincent, where they were again placed in a tomb, to be guarded evermore by the faithful ravens. And to St. Meinrad, St. Oswald, St. Francis, St. Cuthbert, St. Ida and to various other saints and martyrs, did these noble birds render substantial service.

By some nations, the raven was regarded as the bearer of propitious news from the gods, and sacrosanct; to others he was the precursor of evil and an object of dread. With divining power, which enabled him for ages to tell the farmer of the coming of needed rain, the maiden of the coming of her lover, and the invalid of the coming of death, he was received with joy or sadness, according to the message he bore.

The belief in his power of divination was so general that knowledge of the whereabouts of the lost has come to

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be known as "raven's knowledge." To the Romans he was able to reveal the means of restoring lost eyesight, even. In Germany he was able to tell not only where lost articles were, but could also make known to survivors where the souls of their lost friends were to be found.

Faith in his prophetic power was common all over Europe, where he foretold illness and death, and not only could he foretell evil, but he could put forces in action to bring it about, even "shaking contagion from his ominous wing."

In England he was looked upon with greater favor; the mere presence of the home of a raven in a treetop was there enough to insure the continuance in power of the family owning the estate.

The power of the raven continued even after death; his dried head and beak possessed talismanic power, while some parts of his body were important ingredients in every witch's brew. To the North American Indian his split skin drawn over the head of a medicine man gave him the power of prophecy.

In Bohemia he was assigned the task usually performed by the stork in other lands, while in some parts of Germany witches were credited with riding upon his back instead of on the conventional broomstick, as in other regions.

To the raven is attributed power not only over human affairs, but the power also of influencing the elements; in old Greece he brought the rains of summer; in modern China crumbs are thrown to his counterpart, the crow, when he lights on the mast of a ship, that he may be induced to influence the powers of the air to bring favorable winds.

In later times the raven has added interest to many a story. Many of the world's best writers have accorded him

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important rôles in their writings—Shakespeare, Milton, Spencer, Marlowe, Southey, Scott, Tennyson, Dickens, Poe, Longfellow, and an infinity of others. The wealth of raven literature bears indubitable testimony to the interest people of all times and all localities have felt in this remarkable bird—an interest certain to increase with acquaintance.

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TO one with mind open to rural charm, this picturesque bird, solemnly stalking about the fields, or majestically flapping his way to the treetops, is as much a part of the landscape as the fields themselves, or the trees upon their borders; and possesses an interest different from that of any other creature of the feathered race. Though he no longer pursues the craft of the augur, his superior intelligence, great dignity and general air of mystery inspire confidence in his abilities in that line.

What powers were his in the old days! Foolish maidens and ignorant sailors might put their faith in the divining powers of the flighty wren; others might consult the swallow and the kingfisher; but it was to the "many-wintered crow" that kings and the great ones of earth applied for advice, and it was he who never failed them. According to Pliny, he was the only bird capable of realizing the meaning of his portents.

In the early morning light the worthy successors of the ancient Hugin and Munin go forth to-day in quest of news of interest to their clan, just as those historic messengers did in the days when the mighty Norse gods awaited their return, that they might act on the intelligence gathered by them during the daylight hours; and when slanting beams call forth the vesper songs of more tuneful birds, they return,

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followed by long lines of other crows, to their usual haunts on the borders of the marshes. Singly or in long lines, never in loose flocks like blackbirds, they arrive from all directions, till what must be the whole tribe is gathered together—a united family—for the night's repose.

As there in the treetops in the early evening, in convention assembled, they discuss important affairs, who can doubt that certain ones of their number are recognized as leaders, and that they have some form of government among themselves? One after another delivers himself of a harangue, then the whole assemblage joins in noisy applause—or is it disapproval? At other times sociability seems to be the sole object of the gathering.

As one old crow, more meditative than the rest, at the close of the conclave always betakes himself to the same perch, the lonely, upthrust shaft of a lightning-shattered tree on the hillside, we decide that here is old Munin, who has selected this perch as one favorable to meditation—a place where he may ponder undisturbed over the occurrences of the day.

Others among the group have habits just as fixed and noticeable. Even though approaching his perch from the opposite direction, one will be seen to circle and draw near it from the accustomed side; some of the more decided ones will invariably remain just where they alight; others will turn around and arrange themselves on their perches indefinitely. In the fields it will be noticed that some are socially inclined and forage in groups, while others, either from personal choice or that of their neighbors, are more solitary. Like members of the human family, each has his own individual characteristics.

While the chief charm of the crow is his intelligence,

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his dignity also claims our attention. Who ever saw one of his tribe do anything foolish or unbecoming to the funeral director he has ever been since the birth of time, and that he must ever be while time endures? The ancients believed him to be able to scent a funeral several days before death occurred, so sensitive was he to mortuary influences, and there is little doubt he still possesses the power to discern approaching death in many creatures smaller than himself—and to whom he expects to extend the right of sepulchre. Inside and out he is clothed in deepest black; even his tongue and the inside of his mouth are in mourning. Seeming to think it incumbent on him to live up to his funereal garb and occupation, faithful to his trust, with clerical solemnity he goes about his everyday duties.

Gazing on them from his watch-tower in the treetops, what does this grave creature think of the gayer birds that dwell in the meadows and groves round about? What thinks he of the clownish bobolink, in motley nuptial livery, pouring out his silly soul in gurgling, rollicking song in his efforts to please a possible mate, then quarreling with both her and his rivals, who, also, have donned cap and bells to win her favor? What of the unpretentious home—a mere hollow in the ground—where the care-free pair go to housekeeping? What of the redwings building their nests among the reeds in the midst of the marsh—so low as almost to touch the water? Of the fitful wren, incessantly singing of love to his mate, yet who fails to assist her in nest-building, and who proves but an indifferent provider for his young family? Of the lonely Phoebe, calling in plaintive, mysterious tones to a mate unresponsive to his sorrowful beseechings? Of the robin, who makes of the grove a sanctuary? He doubtless has his opinions concerning every one of them, for he views

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them all with interest. Hearing all the other birds singing their love and seeing them winning favor with their brilliant colors, does he envy them?

On the theory of compensation, his sterling qualities render accomplishments and decorative raiment unnecessary. With no song in which to tell his story, and no garments gay to captivate the eye, the crow must needs live his love—and he does—to the end. Seriously he wins the mate to whom he remains true forever. To him the marital bond is not the mere tie of a season, but one that holds through life. He assists the dusky bride of his choice in establishing a commodious home in the most commanding situations available—the top of the tallest tree in the edge of the wood, and which may have been planted by one of his ancestors. He assists her in giving warmth to their eggs in the nest. He carries food to her while she broods over them. He braves every danger in protecting both her and them against predatory hawks and owls and frolicking squirrels, to whom he is known as the “warrior crow.” With tenderest solicitude, he relieves his mate as far as he can in ministering to their nestlings.

And what of the young crows in the nest? When their elders are away on commissary tours, the little ones, bewailing the absence of parents almost constantly, are always found on the return in attitudes of expectancy. To them the approach of older crows, even though it be from the left, is never ominous of anything but good. And when after many excursions baby appetites have been satisfied, in their lofty cradles in the treetops, the infant crows are rocked by the breezes, and though the tuneless throats of the parents yield no songs they are not without music, for soft, æolian lullabies soothe them to sleep.

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The nursery plant is a comfortable one, with gymnasium equipment of sticks and weed-stems, on which the young claws are exercised till strong enough to hold to the branches surrounding the nest when the first unsteady steps are taken outside. Living so high above the ground, they do not leave the nest permanently so early as most other birds. No accidental tumbling into the great outside world for them—but occasionally casualties occur to decrease the family. Should one fall from the nest he would in all probability be regarded as lost. As a rule, the dusky little creatures make many trips out among the higher branches and return again to the nest for rest and refreshment before coming down to earth. On reaching the ground they are initiated by the parents into the ways of older crows. Indeed, the older birds devote the entire summer to the education of their offspring, who willingly remain under their provident care.

While the young are in the nest they are fed in a measure from the throats of the older birds, spiders, beetles, insects of various kinds, eggs, and the young of various birds and animals. Corn is given to them sparingly at first, but its consumption increases with the age of the bird. Sprouting grain is considered an especial dainty for immature crows.

During the plowing season the crow devotes his time to following the furrow and clearing the fields of the pestilential hosts that otherwise would ravish the harvest. To one viewing him sympathetically he seems as necessary to agricultural prosperity as the farmer himself. To be sure, he claims a part of the fruit of the field as his wage, but so does the farmer, who in his efforts to defeat the claims of the bird often dangles the body of a deceased relative from a hedge nearby in plain view of the dark-feathered gleaner. But after viewing the remains, our friend the crow, who in



Photograph by A. Hyatt Verrill

YOUNG CROWS

“On their return they always find their
young in attitudes of expectancy.”

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the pursuit of his calling has grown so accustomed to death in all its forms as to take no note of it, or with a courage born of hunger, carries out his original intention.

When a murderous gunner watches for these birds in the field of newly planted grain, they usually fail to appear till after his departure, when again they seek the old foraging grounds, but, with a cunning developed by persecution, disappear again on his return. Were his enemies to succeed in banishing him from their fields a retributive justice would undoubtedly permit the harvest to suffer. It is not through self-interest, however, that the agriculturist will learn to protect him, but through the stronger force of sentiment.

On hearing farmers talk, one would think that the diet of the crow is entirely granivorous, while no bird has a more adaptable appetite; everything eatable is perfectly acceptable—harmful grubs, beetles, worms, young rats, mice, snakes and moles, as well as mollusks, acorns, nuts, wild fruits and berries are among his staple articles of diet. And, though it is no longer believed that “he shakes contagion from his ominous wing,” he occasions a lamentable amount of infant mortality among rabbits and squirrels, and even among weak-limbed lambs, depriving them of health, strength and happiness—but not through magic. These last he attacks in the eye as the most vulnerable point. In the old days he is reputed to have met with great success as an oculist; in these his patients never recover.

In winter, when cereal stores and acorns which supply the season's want lie buried in snow, and when such animals as in youth were ready prey have grown to a more formidable majority, crows frequently suffer and perish from hunger, and when snows lie long on the ground many of them are found dead beneath their roosting places.

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The voice of the crow when heard distinctly has in it something of the winter's harshness and seems to harmonize best with winter sounds—creaking boughs and shrieking winds—but when modulated by distance it is not unmusical. In the twilight, when calling to his belated brethren across the marshes, his uncanny call might well be taken for the cry of a lost soul craving Christian burial. Yet this might depend on one's mood. To each he seems to speak a different language. To St. Athanasius he said: "*Cras, cras!*" (To-morrow, to-morrow); to the sympathetic Tennyson he always called, in tenderest accents, the name "Maud."

Though this bird is said to have no tongue for expressing the happier emotions, the voice of the mother crow when soothing her nestlings, with gurgling notes of endearment, is tender as the robin's; and the head of the family, though croaking savagely when his mate is molested, and though able to send an exultant "caw" after a retreating enemy, never lowers himself by scolding as the jay does.

In captivity, this bird is often taught to articulate distinctly, when he is as garrulous as in the wood. Occasionally he even utters sounds akin to laughter—or what might be considered laughter in one less grave. A crow that had been taken from the nest and reared in a Virginia home learned to recognize and call by name the different members of the family, whom he followed about the house and grounds, talking incessantly, and making no attempt to return to his own kind and to a wild life.

While an inveterate collector of all small articles for which he could have no possible use, shiny things like coins, silver thimbles, beads and similar articles had an especial attraction for him. Some of these he hid in out-of-the-way places as other crows hide superfluous food for future use,

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and some he planted, stamping them into the ground as his uncivilized brethren of other years planted acorns to be eaten on leaner days, and many of which were forgotten, to grow into great oaks to be used as nesting sites by posterity. Having won immunity from labor as a bread-winner, and no longer having to cull his fare from the fields, he usually dined with the barnyard fowls, with whom he had many disagreements. But, as if to atone for his crimes, when the garden was being spaded he followed his master and diligently cleared the ground of larvæ.

Whatever his faults may be—and they are many—to any one taking the trouble to study the crow, either in captivity or in his native environment, he will prove the most interesting example of his race, an agreeable companion, an ideal home-maker, a thrifty being, a liberal provider, an able defender of his family, a destroyer of harmful insect and animal life, a burier of the dead, a creature of dignity, a keen observer, and the intellectual marvel of the bird world.

I do not love thee less for what is done,
And cannot be undone. Thy very weakness
Hath brought thee nearer to me, and henceforth
My love will have a sense of pity in it.

LONGFELLOW—*Masque of Pandora.*



ORIGIN OF THE WOODPECKER

IN the days when our Lord walked upon the earth with the good Saint Peter, they came to a hut where an old wife sat baking. Tired from the long walk and from fasting, they begged of old Gertrude a bannock to stay their hunger.

The tiny piece of dough which she decided should be their cake, though rolled to thinness, grew so large on the griddle that she refused to part with it. Still a tinier bit she took, but it, too, grew as the first had done—too large to be given as alms. The third and last time a piece so small it could scarcely be seen was taken, but the bannock was again too large—and again she refused to part with it.

As the wayfarers departed in hunger and thirst from her door, she, through her selfishness, began to grow small in punishment for her deed, so small that a human habitation was no longer suitable for her. Up through the chimney she flew, as a woodpecker, blackening her back on the sooty walls. The white apron she wore and the scarlet mutch on her head remained just as they were.

As a further punishment, she was compelled to seek her food in most difficult places. If she could not find it in the trees between bark and bole, she must dig for it in the hard, dry wood. And she was allowed no drink save the raindrops.

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In scarlet hood and soot-stained gown she is seen to-day laboriously digging her tiny home in the solid wood, or flying about among the trees hiding the food she will not eat, or hacking and tapping at the bark for food, and whistling for the rain to come, for she is ever ahunger and ever athirst, and craving for a drop to cool her tongue.

—*Known in Norse mythology as the "Gertrude Story."*



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

FLICKER BEARING FOOD TO HIS YOUNG

WOODPECKER LIFE

ON the thirteenth of July a red-matched descendant of the unfortunate Gertrude knocked on the stricken bough of a lofty elm to crave of the Dryad within hospitality for a season. Yes, her wish would be granted, but only on condition that she would dig out a shelter for herself there in the hard, dry wood, in fulfilment of the ancient curse.

What had gone wrong in the woodpecker family that she was in need of shelter this late in the year? Earlier in the summer she and her mate had burrowed out a comfortable home in a great oak tree not two hundred yards away. Then they were on the best of terms and had relieved each other at the task of digging out their dwelling place. Twenty or twenty-five minutes at a time was thought long enough for either of them to devote to so laborious a task in the spring-time; then the other spent an equal time at the work, while the one off duty hurried away to partake of refreshments or to seek rest in change of occupation.

Then there seemed to be some joy in their lives, for when they had occasionally found time for recreation, they had chased each other around the tree trunks and given utterance to their enjoyment of the game in many a peal of cackling laughter. Near the base of a tree the game began, and, spirally, round and round its trunk, they pursued each other, the one in the lead every now and then casting a challenging

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look behind, then hurrying upward faster than before. Their playtimes were brief, however, for the unfinished burrow was calling.

When this was completed and later a half dozen or more eggs were laid, though madam spent most of her time in dispensing warmth to them, her mate also did his share. Together they had devoted their energies to providing for the little ones that pecked their way out of the round, white eggs. Many long journeys were they compelled to take and many were the hours spent in search of suitable food for their hungry offspring; but on their return, their throats were always full to the brim with the nourishment which they pumped into infant throats as, hanging head downward over them, they clung with their claws to the entrance of their home. And when after a time the chicks were old enough to scramble about on the trunk of the tree outside their home, a wheezy call from one of them was enough to bring one or both of the parents, with throat distended with the best the wood afforded, to minister to their wants. Together they had driven away the over-solicitous squirrels and meddlesome sparrows who came to visit them. Together they had guided their asthmatic young family about the wood, teaching them by example, if not by precept, where food was to be found, and how to meet the dangers they were likely to encounter at any moment.

The accidents of nature had depleted the brood, till now but two of them were left. A ball of baby feathers in the home of an owl living in the wood told the story of the passing of one of them; the gladness which attended the homecoming of a foraging mother squirrel marked the taking off of another; so they had gone, till only these two remained, wheezy and exacting.

WOODPECKER LIFE

Of late the care of them had fallen mainly on the father, who picked up a living for them as best he could. At times he seemed to try to get away from them—a futile effort, for when they did not follow his undulating flight in their awkward up-and-down fashion, they went in search of him if he was gone a few minutes over time.

Here on the thirteenth of July was the mother seeking shelter away from her former home. Had there been a family disagreement? Was the home-nest no longer large enough for the parent birds and their now almost grown-up family? Was she planning for a new brood? Surely not! It would be impossible to rear in a single season two broods requiring so much care.

Whatever her purpose, here she was, drawing her plans on the under side of the dry old bough. Soon she began to peck out an entrance, and it was not long before the chips were flying in every direction. More than an hour she worked, then flew to the dead top of a tree across the way, where she sat for a brief time, resting and sunning herself. Twice she left her perch to dart out after passing insects, then returned to her labor. Occasionally she swung around to the top side of the dead branch, and tore off bits of bark, either for the purpose of seeing if the hole was going clear through or for securing the insect fare lurking under it. This part of the work continued at intervals, till the bark was removed from all the excavated portion of the bough. All day, until about five o'clock, she spent at her task with but little rest, then there was a long visit to the rest perch in the neighboring treetop.

The early morning hours were probably devoted to commissary tours, for it was almost eight o'clock when she appeared on the scene of her labors and again began to wield

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the pick. About ten o'clock her spouse appeared and arranged himself comfortably on the same limb about a foot away from the hole she was digging, but not by so much as a single stroke did he assist her. Soon a wheezy, whistling cry called him to duties as insistent as home building, and he departed.

After watching the progress of woodpecker affairs for some time, a dweller in the house under the tree decided to lend a hand. A worm-eaten hitching-post stood near, on which was placed pieces of bread for the hungry little wielder of the pick. This not only satisfied her wants, but served also to bring her mate and offspring near occasionally. At first the young members of the family refused to pick up this food set before them, but, instead, clung to a neighboring tree and called vociferously for help. Then the father took the bits of bread and pushed them far down into the screaming throats. The young Romulus must have possessed wonderful powers of endurance if the woodpeckers of old ministered to him as vigorously in response to his infantile wails as the woodpeckers of to-day respond to the screaming demands of their own offspring. How gentle the wolf must have seemed in comparison!

Several times the young woodpeckers followed the father to the limb in which the mother was chiseling a home. Together they watched her work, but during the first three days seemed to take no interest whatever in the hole she was making. Then the father went in and examined the opening, but flew away without giving any real aid. And all through the work his assistance seemed to be limited to inspection.

In her digging, the mother woodpecker clung with her claws to the opening of the burrow, and, head downward,



Photograph by Francis H. Herrick

FLICKER FEEDING HIS YOUNG

(HIS HABITS ARE SIMILAR TO THE RED-HEADS)

"The father pushed bits of bread
far down into the screaming throats."

WOODPECKER LIFE

pecked rapidly. Sometimes she would throw out chips—which were little more than coarse sawdust—after three or four blows; again, she worked for a minute or two, then threw out several billfuls at a time. In throwing out these chips she slipped backward and forward over the lower edge of the opening, after the manner of that old-fashioned toy called a “supple jack.” First she threw her chips to one side, then to the other, till the ground beneath the burrow for a space thirty feet in circumference was generously sprinkled with them.

Though several persons were watching her, and though squirrels were springing about among the branches, she was not disturbed, but went steadily on with her task. While she was away on short vacations, the wren, dwelling in the porch roof beneath, frequently investigated the hole she was digging—sparrows examined it, and squirrels looked into it, but it was very noticeable that they all had an eye on her return. Once in her absence one of her own young woodpeckers scrambled to the edge of the hole and peeped in for a moment, then scuttled back again to the place where the dead branch joined the trunk of the tree, and in his usual noisy manner demanded food.

It was near the end of the third day’s labor that the woodpecker was first seen “trying on” her new home. Then she went into it, and, nestling there, with head up for the first time, looked out of the window. Evidently the pocket was neither deep enough nor wide enough, for after this she worked on both bottom and sides of it, scattering chips as before. The work periods were shorter now and the rests more frequent, showing that her strength was failing. On the afternoon of the fifth day, when the burrow was finished, completely exhausted, she made her way to the roof of the

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house, where, with wings spread, she lay for more than an hour. Seemingly too tired to reach her usual resting place in the treetop across the way, she lay there gathering strength for the longer flight.

Though the sexes are alike in the redhead family, it was not difficult to distinguish them in this case, for the feathers about the head and neck of the mother were much more worn than those of her less industrious mate. Yet it may be an injustice to him to accuse him of indolence, for was he not purveying to their younglings?—a task which may have taxed his energies to the limit. Perhaps, after all, it was only a case of division of labor.

After the completion of the burrow, though the woodpecker was anxiously watched for, for several days, she was not seen near it again, though the usual bits of bread placed on the hitching-post brought her to its neighborhood.

The experiment was tried of putting some of the crusts on top of the post and stuffing others tightly into the large worm-holes. The latter were invariably taken first. Though the young birds came there regularly to be fed, more than a week passed before they made the slightest effort to help themselves. They would cling to the sides of the post and, with upward-pointing, open bills, whistle asthmatically for the food, which the parents were compelled to place in their throats. Whether it was wilfulness or inability that caused them to act as they did, it was impossible to determine.

The whistling of the young birds, which was once believed to predict rain, or to be a demand for it from a thirsty throat, always precedes or accompanies the taking of food. It is doubtless a little more frequent before showers, for at such times the older birds are able to collect more beetles and

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other insects that come out then from their shelters into the open.

The old belief that woodpeckers are ever athirst because of their inability to drink any save the rain that falls into their open throats or the drops that fall from the leaves, may have some foundation. In the case of this family, though a basin of water was always conveniently near, and though sparrows, robins, bluejays and wrens constantly patronized it, no woodpecker was ever seen to refresh himself from it—many as there were of them in the vicinity.

When more bread than the four birds could consume was placed in the post, the older ones carried a part of it away—usually the larger pieces on top—for future use, or pounded it tightly into worm-holes in the same post, but never into the ones in which they found it.

Several weeks after the burrow was finished, one evening just about sunset, a red head was seen peeping from the window in the treetop; then it was drawn back, and again it appeared and was withdrawn, to be seen no more during the evening. It was a dormitory, then, that you hollowed out for yourself, was it, my lady?

One morning, near the close of August, it was noticed that the entrance to the lodging was distinctly larger, and that a patch of daylight showed through from the other side. Whether for some reason the bird herself had enlarged the opening before departing for the South, or whether this had been done by mischievous squirrels on murder bent, is not known; but certain it is that the red-matched laborer was gone. Others of her kind lingered in the grove for a week or more, and though food was placed on the accustomed post, neither she nor any of her immediate family appeared to claim it.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

When he is gone, the most accomplished songsters are not missed more than the red-headed woodpecker, whose broad patches of clear color enliven the wood. Though he may no longer assist in the growth of the forest by bringing refreshing showers, as he is said to have done in the long-ago time, he certainly is doing much in his own way to preserve them. Well might the ancients have made a god of him. He still possesses one of the gifts which won that honor for him—the power of producing thunder—and in a way that mortals can understand. Hear it rumbling among the dead treetops, as the bird drums rapidly on the dry wood and sets it to vibrating, then quickly lays his hollow bill against it to add resonance to the peal. Vulcan himself could not have felt greater satisfaction than he, as he stops to listen, in conscious pride over his accomplishment.

Whether he is a god made manifest in feathers, or merely an old woman under a curse, expiating the crime of selfishness in picking up a living where there seems to be no life, and in sharing this scant fare with the hungry, as we see this bird with breast flattened and shoulders bent by hard work, while our sympathies are awakened, we bless the day that gave to the world this tireless little laborer of the wood.

BIRD LORE

OWL LORE

A STORY similar to the Gertrude story of the woodpecker is told of a baker's daughter refusing a cake to our Lord when ahungered, and who was for her selfishness transformed into an owl.

From her habit of moving her head from side to side, another legend represents her as an old weaver, silently weaving her silver web of the moonbeams.

To the Etruscans the owl was a psychopompos, or soul-guide—Ceres turned a son of Styx into an owl because he blabbed the secret of Persephone eating pomegranate seeds in the realm of Hades.

According to Ovid, in old Rome it was believed that witches could transform themselves into screech owls and return to human form at pleasure. In owl form they throttled or sucked the blood of babes asleep in their cradles, as cats suck their breath.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

In an English nursery rhyme, the owl sings:

Once I was a monarch's daughter,
And sat on a lady's knee,
But am now a mighty rover,
Banished to the ivy tree.

Crying, "Hoo hoo, hoo hoo, hoo hoo,
Hoo! hoo! hoo! my feet are cold!
Pity me, for here you see me,
Persecuted, poor and old!"

In another north-country nursery song she sings:

"Oh! o o o o o
I once was a king's daughter,
And sat on my father's knee;
But now I'm a poor hoolet,
And hide in a hollow tree."

This owl princess is supposed to be none other than Pharaoh's daughter.

A Breton legend has it that once upon a time each of all the birds gave a feather to the wren, who had lost her own in trying to secure fire from heaven. The owl alone refused this charity, saying: "I will not give up a single feather; the winter is coming on, and I fear the cold." "Very well," replied the king; "from this day on thou shalt be the most wretched of birds, always shivering with cold. Thou shalt never leave thy abode but by night, and if thou shouldst show thyself in the daytime other birds shall pursue and persecute thee." From that very time the owl has never ceased to cry "hou, hou!" as if perishing with the cold.

OWL LORE

The owl's shriek causes an infant's death.—*Arab.*

"The owl, for all his feathers, was acold."—KEATS.

The owl's cry at night betokens a change of weather.

In China the owl is known as the "bird which calls for the soul."

In England it was once a common belief that if an owl appeared at a birth it foreboded ill-luck to the infant.

In the north, the home of the white owl, she is believed to possess prophetic power superior to that of any other bird.

A Hebrides belief is that if an owl scream three times over your home at night, a death will surely follow unless some one calls out: "Pepper and salt for your mammy!"

In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder says of the owl: "It is a portent of the night; and makes its presence known by no kind of song, but rather by sobs and moans. Accordingly, whenever it shows itself in cities, or at all by daylight, it prognosticates dire misfortune." Pliny, quoting another writer, says: "The owl, unlike most other birds, issues from the egg back foremost; inasmuch as one side of the egg is weighed down by the great size of its head, so the lighter end containing the back is presented to the fostering warmth of the mother."

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

To kill an owl makes one's cows give bloody milk.

In Syria, the owl is called the "mother of ruins"; in Ireland, "the old woman of the night."

In Belgium, scrambled owl's eggs are deemed, by the superstitious, a potent cure for drunkenness.

In Greece, the owl was sacred to Athena because of the power of seeing in the night, which both possessed.

In some European countries dead owls were once nailed to rafters or on doors to avert any evil which their living presence might have brought.

The blacks of Australia believe that when an owl is killed, a woman's death is sure to follow, as a man's death must follow the killing of a bat.

Parts of owls were considered particularly efficacious in witches' potions. Medea, the witches in Macbeth, and many others used them in their brews.

It is an Indian superstition that if you fix your eyes on an owl and walk round and round him, he will follow you with his eyes till his head is twisted from his body.

The heart of a white owl laid on the breast over the heart of a sleeping woman was believed to have the power of causing her to divulge her secrets; and the heart of a white owl, carried into battle, possessed the talismanic power of inspiring courage, averting danger and insuring success.

WREN LORE

BOTH Pliny and Aristotle allude to the story of the rivalry between the eagle and the wren. The same story, with variations, is told by the North American Indians, and it is also common in Germany, France, Scotland and Norway.

In early English tradition the wren has the credit of being the robin's wife; and in Icelandic, of being the mouse's brother.

Though the wren to-day seems the most domestic of birds, in history she is given a bad reputation, being identified with sorcery, witchcraft, and immorality. In Norse mythology she is a malignant fairy, whose office is to lead youths astray. Until recently, on the Isle of Man, the masculine inhabitants turned out to hunt the wren on Christmas Day, believing her to have been once a sort of Lorelei, who, by her songs and charms, had lured young men into the sea, where the waves swept them away to death, and who had assumed this tiny, feathered form when pursued by the enraged people. For some reason it was believed that this malignant Lorelei wren would always go about working her wicked charms on Christmas Day, till she should perish by the hand of man. For this reason men hunted the wren and

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

kept the feathers of all such birds as were killed on this day to use as amulets against shipwreck.

Wren hunts were also common in Ireland, where many wren-hunt songs were sung. Each hunter carried two sticks, one with which to beat the hedges, and one to throw at the bird. When in the hunt a wren was killed, it was placed on a ribbon-decked ivy or holly bough, or suspended in two hoops crossed at right angles and decked with evergreens and ribbons, and borne about triumphantly at the head of a procession.

One of these songs is given in Crofton Croker's "Researches," as follows:

IRISH WREN-HUNT SONG

"The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
Saint Stephen's Day was caught in the furze;
Although he is little, his family's great—
I pray you, good landlady, give us a treat.

"My box it would speak, if it had but a tongue,
And two or three shillings would do it no wrong;
Sing holly, sing ivy—sing ivy, sing holly,
A drop just to drink, it would drown melancholy.

"And if you draw it of the best,
I hope your soul in heaven may rest;
But if you draw it of the small,
It won't agree with the wren boys at all."

WREN LORE

The following wren song, with verses sometimes varied to suit the singer, is probably the most common:

“ ‘Let us go to the wood!’ said Richard to Robin.

‘Let us go to the wood!’ said Robin to Bobbin.

‘Let us go to the wood!’ said John, all alone.

‘Let us go to the wood!’ said every one.

‘What shall we do there?’ said Richard to Robin, etc.

‘We will hunt the wren,’ said Richard to Robin, etc.

‘Where is he? Where is he?’ said Richard to Robin, etc.

‘In yonder green bush,’ said Richard to Robin, etc.

‘How can we get him down?’ said Richard to Robin, etc.

.

‘He’s eaten! He’s eaten!’ said Richard to Robin, etc.”

There are thirty-two verses of a similar song, as given by Mr. Swainson in “Folk Lore of British Birds.” Other wren songs are equally full of repetition.

In some districts the wren hunt took place on St. Stephen’s Day, because at the time St. Stephen was being brought to execution and was about to escape from his sleeping jailors, a wren flew on the face of one of them and woke him.

Mr. Swainson tells us that a proclamation was issued by Richard Dowden, Mayor of Cork in 1845, prohibiting the wren hunt in the interest of “prevention of cruelty to animals,” but that the custom is still observed in some parts of Connaught.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

A somewhat similar custom of wren-hunting followed by conviviality prevails in France, where the youth who kills the bird is dubbed king.

To-day many Manxmen will not put to sea without a dead wren to ward off storms and disasters, because once upon a time a queer sort of a something called a Jes spirit, which hunted herring and brought on storms, whisked herself into a wren, when pursued, and flew away. So it is believed that when a dead wren is aboard, this Jes spirit is dead to that part of the sea lying around about.

It is a Gaelic belief that no house that the wren frequents ever dies out.

“He that hurts a robin or a wren,
Will never prosper, sea nor land.”

—*Yorkshire Couplet.*

A Breton Legend:—The wren, being able to fly higher than any other bird, secured the coveted fire from heaven and started on her earthward journey, but in her descent her wings began to burn, compelling her to intrust her precious burden to the robin, whose feathers also burst into flames, as his breast still shows. The lark, coming to the rescue, brought the prize in safety to mankind on earth.

In some parts of Brittany it is said that the wren brought the fire from the lower regions, and that her feathers were scorched as she passed through the keyhole.

On this account the wren, together with the robin, the lark and the swallow, as fire-bringers, are regarded as sacred, and the robbing of their nests as acts of horror. In some of

WREN LORE

the French provinces such crimes are believed to be punished by the destruction of the offender's house by lightning. Another superstition is that the fingers of the offending hand will shrivel away and drop off.

Like the robin and the raven, the wren was often the companion of saints.

EAGLE LORE

ACCORDING to some old stories, a dip in the ocean wave renews the youth of the eagle; according to others, before the dip, the bird spreads his feathers to the sun, which consumes them; then plunging into the purifying and vivifying water, he arises in youth.

The young eagle was said to begin life with a fire test.

In some parts of Ireland it is believed that Adam and Eve still exist as eagles.

In religious history the eagle figures as the companion of saints because, according to Saint Jerome, "he ascends to the very throne of God."

It was once a matter of common belief that the young eagle who could not look the sun in the eye unflinchingly was slain by its parents as unfit for an eagle's career.

Among the Dakotah Indians there is a deluge legend to the effect that when the flood came, all the Indians, hoping to escape, fled to a hilltop, but were finally overwhelmed—all but one woman, who was borne away by a great eagle, her father swooping down, and carried to a high mountain. She afterward became the mother of twins, who perpetuated the race.

EAGLE LORE

To the Indian, the eagle was the keeper of fires, sun, moon and stars.

The eagle is used as a symbol of power by the United States, Austria and Russia.

In olden times the eagle was the symbol of war, around which the armies of Rome rallied.

In early England it was believed that eagle's feathers would consume any other feathers placed with them.

The North American Indian still decorates his war bonnet with eagle's feathers, each feather being the symbol of a great deed done.

In Finnish literature the eagle brings fire from heaven to reward Vaino for leaving the birch tree standing as a perch and nesting place for birds.

The North American Indian believes that the sky is inhabited by a great eagle, who causes thunder to roll and snow and hail to fall by the shaking of his mighty feathers.

In Greek mythology the eagle is emblematic of the destructive power of Zeus.

Bird of Pan in early Greek mythology.

The eagle was one of the guardians of Walhalla, the banquet-hall of the Norse gods.

SWALLOW LORE

SWALLOWS in antiquity were deemed lucky on land but unlucky at sea. Cleopatra abandoned a voyage on seeing one of these birds on the masthead of her ship.

The killing of a swallow makes the cows give bloody milk.

Swallows building under the eaves bring good luck to a house.

To kill a swallow brings misfortune, in Germany, and there no one dares to destroy her nest.

Possessing weather intelligence, swallows tell us, when they fly high, that the day will be clear; when low, that it will be cloudy or stormy.

In Norway it is said that when the Saviour hung on the cross a pitying swallow, perching there, peered sorrowfully down and twitted "Hugsva, sva, sva. Honom!" ("Console, console, console Him!")

The Russian peasant believes that on the 25th of March the swallow comes flying from Paradise to bring warmth to the earth, while other Europeans believe that she comes before Maundy Thursday to be present at the commemoration of the crucifixion.

SWALLOW LORE

In Bohemia in the springtime if one swallow is first seen by a maiden she will be married during the year; if a pair, she will remain single.

Once upon a time the present to a lady of a gold ring that had lain in a swallow's nest nine days inspired love in her breast for the donor.

The heart of a swallow worn around the neck was supposed to render the wearer attractive; the same amulet was used to strengthen memory.

In Ireland the peasants believe that there is a certain hair on every one's head, which, if picked off by a swallow, dooms the man to perdition.

In Norfolk they say that when swallows congregate about churches before departing for the South they are deciding who shall die before their return.

If a swallow flies under a cow she gives bloody milk and is said to be "swallow struck." She may be cured by sprinkling her milk on the spot where roads cross.

An old French legend says that it was the swallow that removed the crown of thorns from the brow of Christ, and that a thorn, piercing her breast, gave it the ruddy dye.

Pliny tells of the swallow curing blindness in her progeny by the use of the swallow herb, a magic plant which, if taken from her and carried in the pocket, would insure wealth to the possessor.

MAGPIE LORE

A NOTHER story of the magpie's nest-building differs from the one already told in that the magpie was the teacher.

The magpie is said to be the only bird that did not go into the ark with Noah. Instead, she sat on the roof and chattered of disaster.

In most sections the magpie is considered a bird of evil omen, though she occasionally prophesies births and weddings.

An old rhyme gives the import of her prophecies:

“One is sorrow, two is mirth,
Three a wedding, four a birth,
Five for silver, six for gold,
Seven for a secret, not to be told;
Eight for heaven, nine for hell,
‘Ten for the de’il’s ain sel’.”

—*Northumberland.*

In England one magpie was thought to be a sign of bad weather, while two betokened fair, because, when chilling winds blew, only one bird could leave the nest in quest of food; but when the day was mild or warm, both might go forth without causing the young to suffer.

MAGPIE LORE

In mythology she is the bird of Bacchus.

In Germany her chattering is prophetic of coming guests.

From its thieving habits, the magpie is called the "egg-lift" in Lincolnshire.

In Scotland the perching of a magpie on a house is believed to foretell the death of a child.

In Germany it is believed that witches assume magpie form—or that they ride on the backs of these birds.

In Scotland the magpie was once called the "devil's bird," and was believed to have the devil's blood in his tongue. If her tongue was scratched and a drop of human blood inserted, it was believed that she would receive the gift of speech.

In England, when an unlucky number of these birds is seen by the superstitious, a cross is made in the air, or the hat removed and a bow made to the birds, to neutralize the charm. With crossed thumbs this rhyme is often repeated:

"I cross the magpie,
The magpie crosses me;
Bad luck to the magpie,
And good luck to me."

The sight of a crow will also break the charm—or spitting over the shoulder—or crossing the feet—or making the sign of the cross on the breast.

ROBIN LORE

ON seeing the suffering of our Lord on the cross, the robin in pity plucked a thorn, which pierced his brow, from the torturing crown. The blood from the tender heart of the robin gushed forth as the sharp thorn entered his own breast, producing a crimson stain that remains to this day.

—*A Breton Legend.*

The robin, as well as the swallow and the woodpecker, was classed as a fire-bringer. Each bears a red mark to fortify the claim. A correspondent of *Notes and Queries* sent this story told by a Caermarthenshire nurse to a child under her care: "Far, far away in a land of woe, dwell darkness, and spirits of evil and fire. Day by day does the little bird bear in his bill a drop of water to quench the flame. So near to the burning stream does he fly, that his dear little feathers are scorched, and hence he is named Bronrhuddyn (breast-burned or breast-scorched). To serve little children, the robin dares approach the infernal pit. No good child will hurt the devoted benefactor of man. The robin returns from the land of fire, and therefore he feels the cold of winter far more than his brother birds. He shivers in the brumal

ROBIN LORE

blast; hungry, he chirps before your door. Oh, my child, then, in gratitude, throw a few crumbs to poor redbreast!"

Shakespeare refers to the robin as "the ruddock with charitable bill."

In Germany and the British Isles the killing of a robin causes the cow of the slayer to give bloody milk.

In Bohemia the destruction of a robin's nest is believed to bring palsy to the hands of the destroyer, while in the Tyrol such a wrongdoer is expected to be visited by epilepsy. In Suffolk a broken leg is the natural result of breaking the eggs of a robin.

The story of the "Babes in the Wood," taken from a play written in 1601, is but an expression of the still older belief that robins cover dead bodies with leaves, on finding them unburied.

"The robin redbreast, if he find a man or woman dead, will cover his face with moss; and some think that if the body should remain unburied he will cover the whole body."

—*Johnson's "Cornucopia," published late in the sixteenth century.*

THE ROBIN

My old Welsh neighbor, over the way,
Crept slowly out in the sun of spring,
Pushed from her ears the locks of gray,
And listened to hear the robin sing.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

Her grandson, playing at marbles, stopped,
And, cruel in sport as boys will be,
Tossed a stone at the bird, who hopped
From bough to bough in the apple tree.

"Nay!" said the grandmother; "have you not heard,
My poor, bad boy, of the fiery pit,
And how, drop by drop, this merciful bird
Carries the water that quenches it?"

"He brings cool dew in his little bill,
And lets it fall on the souls of sin;
You can see the mark on his red breast still,
Of fires that scorch as he drops it in.

"My poor bron rhuddyn! My breast-burned bird,
Singing so sweetly from limb to limb!
Very dear to the heart of our Lord
Is he who pities the lost like him!"

"Amen!" I said to the beautiful myth;
"Sing, bird of God, in my heart as well;
Each good thought is a drop wherewith
To cool and lessen the fires of hell."

Prayers of love like raindrops fall,
Tears of pity are cooling dew;
And dear to the heart of our Lord are all
Who suffer like Him in the good they do.

WHITTIER.

ROBIN LORE

A BRETON LEGEND

"Bearing His cross, while Christ passed forth forlorn,
His God-like forehead by the mock crown torn,
A little bird took from that crown one thorn,
To soothe the dear Redeemer's throbbing head.
That bird did what she could; His blood, 'tis said,
Down dropping, dyed her tender bosom red.
Since then no wanton boy disturbs her nest;
Weasel nor wildcat will her young molest;
All sacred deem the bird of ruddy breast."

HOSKYNS-ABRAHALL—*The Redbreast.*

RAVEN LORE

ORIGIN OF THE RAVEN

TRUE it is—and it would be an injustice to conceal the fact, much more to deny it—that ravens of old fed Elijah; but that was the punishment of some old sin committed by two who before the flood bore the human shape, and who, soon after the ark rested on Mount Ararat, flew off to the desolation of swamped forests and the disfigured solitudes of the drowned glens. Dying ravens hide themselves from daylight in burial places among the rocks, and are seen hobbling into their tombs, as if driven thither by a flock of fears, and crouching under a remorse that disturbs instinct, even as if it were conscience. So sings and says the Celtic superstition—muttered to us in a dream—adding that there are raven ghosts; great black bundles of feathers, forever in the forest, night-hunting in famine for prey, emitting a last feeble croak at the blush of dawn, and then all at once invisible.”

—*Wilson's "Recreations of Christopher North."*

ORIGIN OF CROWS—ESKIMO

In the moon of falling leaves, an Indian mother, the wife of a chief, took with her into the forest her children that they

RAVEN LORE

might help her in gathering spruce boughs to be used in collecting the eggs of salmon. Leaving the children to watch a pile of boughs on the beach, she returned to find them gone. On calling to them to return she was answered only by the voices of crows flying about over the forest. For their wandering and disobedience they were doomed to live in this form forevermore, and to this day crows are carved on the totems of all of their tribe.

A HEBRIDES FABLE

A crow never can be put to shame. The lapwing, who, as every one knows, has a habit of repeating himself, said to the crow: "I never saw your like for stealing eggs, for stealing eggs." The crow, rubbing his beak on the grass, replied: "Nor did we ourselves, though it is we who are older."

—*Journal of Am. Folk Lore.*

WHY RAVENS ARE BLACK—A TYROLESE STORY

In the old days ravens were of beautiful appearance, with plumage as white as snow, which they kept clean by constant washing in a stream. To this stream came once upon a time the Holy Child desiring to drink, but the ravens prevented him by splashing about and making muddy the water. Whereupon He said: "Ungrateful birds! Proud you may be of your beauty, but your feathers so snowy white shall become black and remain so till the Judgment Day," and so they have been ever since.

ZINGERLE.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

In the myth of the metamorphosis of Coronis by Apollo as told by Ovid, the raven, once white, was turned black for deceitful conduct.

“The raven flies not straight like other birds, but crooked because cursed by Noah.”

THE CROW STONE

“On the first of April boil the eggs taken out of a crow’s nest until they are hard, and being cold, let them be placed in the nest as they were before. When the crow knows this she flies a long way to find the stone, and returns with it to her nest, and the eggs being touched with it they become fresh and prolific. The stone must be immediately snatched out of the nest. Its virtue is to increase riches, to bestow honors, and foretell future events.”

LEONARDUS CAMILLUS—*Mirror of Stones*.

In Brittany two crows are said to come and perch on the house-roof when the head of the family is about to die. Two crows are there assigned to every family to foretell family events.

—*Journal of Folk Lore, Vol. XI.*

Hindoos gave food to the crows as to the souls of the dead.

—*Zoological Mythology, p. 253.*

In Switzerland a crow perching on the roof of a house in which a corpse lies means that the soul of the dead is lost.

SWAINSON.

RAVEN LORE

"In Sussex the cry of the crow thrice repeated is considered a sure sign of death."

In Bohemia, peasants declare that from springtime up to St. Lawrence's, or, according to some, St. Bartholomew's Day, the crows dare not roost in the forest or on trees, because they were the birds who pecked out the eyes of St. Lawrence, or, as some say, of St. Carlo Borromeo. The children are also told on the birth of a baby that it was brought to the house by crows, who let it fall down the chimney.

GROHMANN.

"In Andalusia, if the raven is heard croaking over a house, an unlucky day is expected; repeated thrice, it is a fatal presage." If perching high, turning and croaking, a corpse will come from that direction.

In some parts of Europe the raven is supposed to have the power of bringing infection.

"Saturday is the raven's day, and woe to the armies that fall on that day under the gloom of its ominous wing."

—*Robinson's "Poet's Birds," p. 381.*

WEATHER LORE

"When crows fly low it is a sign of rain."

When rooks or crows stay at home or return early in the day, rain should be expected; if they fly far away it will be fair.

—*Devonshire.*

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

Ravens bring the summer rain.

—*Greece.*

When rooks congregate on the dead branches of trees
there will be rain before night; if they sit on the live
branches, the day will be fine.

—*Yorkshire.*

WOODPECKER LORE

VARIATIONS of the Gertrude story are told in other lands of the owl, cuckoo and lapwing.

In Norway the woodpecker is called "Gertrude's fowl."

In Greek fable, Palytechus was changed to a woodpecker.

FRENCH STORY OF THE WOODPECKER

In the beginning, when the earth had been created but had not yet been given permanent form, the birds were told to hollow out with their beaks places in the form of lakes, rivers and pools, that would be filled later with water. All obeyed except the indolent woodpecker, who, because of her refusal, was denied the privilege of even drinking from the cavities made by other birds; she should drink nothing save rain, and should get that as she could. And so it is that she ever calls to the clouds, "Rain, rain," and that she ever keeps an upward attitude that she may receive in her open beak the drops which fall from the leaves.

BIRD LEGEND AND LIFE

The woodpecker is said to laugh before rain because the insects on which it feeds come out of their hiding places at that time.

In Germany a woodpecker flying to the right was an omen of good fortune.

Because of his blood-red coat and fiery eye the woodpecker is known in mythology as the bird of Mars.

Because his name was too sacred to use, the Greeks spoke of the woodpecker as the "tree chiseller" or "hewer with an ax."^{*}

In German legends we are told that the woodpecker knows where grows the magic Springwurz, the herb which will enable the possessor to open the closed doors of mountain rocks; to enter and bear away the treasures of the Venusberg. Pliny also tells of the woodpecker bringing the springwort.

The Italians worshiped in the woodpecker the great god Picus, and the Esthonians their rain and thunder god, Pikne or Pikker. In 1644 Johann Gutsloff noted the prayer of the old Esthonian farmer: "Beloved Piker, we will sacrifice to thee an ox with two horns and four hoofs, and want to beg you as to our ploughing and sowing that our straw shall be red as copper and our grain as yellow as gold. Send elsewhither all black, thick clouds over great swamps, high woods and wide wastes. But give to us ploughmen and sowers a fertile season and sweet rain."

WOODPECKER LORE

Whoever takes honey from the hive with the beak of a woodpecker will not be stung.

It is believed in Italy that this bird purveyed to Romulus after the wolfy fountains failed.

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